



Our Village

Joseph C. Lincoln



To my darlings
Sister Grace,
and niece,

Grace Willits-Memor

May 31st / 1909.

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OUR VILLAGE

THE WORKS OF JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

CY WHITTAKER'S PLACE

MR. PRATT "CAP'N ERI"

PARTNERS OF THE TIDE

THE "OLD HOME HOUSE"

CAPE COD BALLADS



"Good morning, Pashy. How d'ye do, Huldy? Nice seasonable weather we're having.'"

OUR VILLAGE

BY

JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

Author of "Cy Whittaker's Place,"
"Cap'n Eri," etc.



ILLUSTRATED

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The reminiscences of boy life in a New England seashore village, contained in this volume, originally appeared as follows: "Our House," "Our Oldest Inhabitant," "The Old Maids," and "Teacher," in *Collier's Weekly*; "The Cape Cod Clambake," in *Good Housekeeping*; "The School Picnic," in *Success*; and "A Christmas Memory," in *Country Life in America*. The author desires to thank the editors of these periodicals for their courteous permission to republish.

With much pleasure
I now present
and wish you
a new volume

TO
S. E. H.
WHO KNEW AND LOVED
“OUR HOUSE”
AND THOSE WHO DWELT THEREIN

C O N T E N T S

	PAGE
OUR HOUSE	3
A CAPE COD CLAMBAKE	29
THE OLD MAIDS	57
THE SCHOOL PICNIC	85
OUR OLDEST INHABITANT	111
TEACHER	135
A CHRISTMAS MEMORY	165

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FACING
PAGE

- "'Good morning, Pashy. How d'ye do, Huldy?
Nice seasonable weather we're having '"
Frontispiece
- "'I was courtin' you then, Tempy. . . . Do
you remember?'" 52
- "'Don't talk to me about money *these* hard
times!'" 120
- "'He'll be awful tickled with them skates'" . 182

OUR HOUSE



OUR HOUSE

ONE minute to twelve by the eight-sided wooden clock on the wall over teacher's desk. The hot forenoon session was all but over. You closed your geography with a leaf turned down at the page where the woodcut of the "Palisades of the Hudson" was bordered by the penciled gem:

If my name you still would find,
Look on page 149,

and slid the book under the ink-smeared, pin-scratched lid of your desk.

Teacher struck the little bell on her table. The third class in arithmetic, which had been

Our Village

fighting a drawn battle with common fractions on the settees at the rear of the room, returned to its seats with the soft "pad" of bare feet and the squeaking of ungreased, copper-toed boots. "Snuppy" Rogers, who had brought a turtle to school, and had left it in his desk, reached his seat just in time to prevent the creature from crawling out and tumbling to the floor. Snuppy drew a breath of relief and immured the captive in the dungeon of his jacket pocket.

Teacher struck her bell again. The last book slammed out of sight and the school came to attention, hands behind backs. "Ting!"—every scholar was on his or her feet. "Ting!"—and the files began moving toward the doors, girls on one side and boys on the other, marching sedately until the threshold was crossed, then grabbing hats and caps and leaping down the stairs in a racketous riot that awoke old Cap'n Daniels, asleep behind the tobacco and candy show case in his grocery, dry goods, and general store across the road.

Our house was a good half mile from

Our House

school, but you were there in five minutes. *Going* to school—oh, that was different! Sometimes it took three quarters of an hour to *go* to school; and Sunday-school about the same. But when a boy consumed more than five minutes in getting back to dinner from either place, the folks appeared suspicious and asked embarrassing questions concerning his health or behavior.

You entered our house by the side door, of course. That was the door of the dining room, and it had wistaria and morning-glory vines shading the latticed porch above it, and the humming birds used to come there for honey. You saw them sometimes when you were sitting by the window, and were obliged to keep very still or else be asked if you really were learning your Sunday-school lesson or only fooling. You seldom saw them at other times because you didn't keep still long enough.

Though you entered our house by the side door, there was a front door and a back door.



Our Village

But nobody ever went in at the front door, except the new minister, maybe, when he made his first call, and he didn't try it the second time. You see, the hinges of the front gate had remained so long without exercise, in all sorts of weather, that they had acquired chronic "rheumatics," and groaned and shrieked agonized protests when disturbed. And the box hedges each side of the front walk were so *very* puritanical and prim that they appeared to be standing parish committees investigating one's religious opinions.

"Hum!" you could imagine the right-hand hedge sniffing as the new divine moved up the walk. "So *that's* the fellow they've called, is it? Young squirt, isn't he? He'll have to grow some before he can fill old Parson Simpkins' shoes."

"I should think so!" responded the left-hand hedge. "Look at those side whiskers. And I don't exactly like the way he's dressed. Kind of worldly—kind—of—worldly. I wouldn't wonder if he was one of those advanced thinkers. I don't believe that's the sort of minister *we* want."

Our House

And the big shells on each side of the front steps were orthodox and "sot in their ways" as the hedges. And the bell with the glass knob announced one's timid pull with *such* a ponderous "Clank! r-r-rattle! DING DONG! DING DONG! DING DONG! DING DONG! DING—DING—DING!"

No, the front door wasn't popular; the very good and intensely respectable seldom are, I'm afraid. And the back door was rather out of the way and led to the wash shed—which meant tubs to be pumped full, whether you wanted to or not—and the wood box and kindling bins and other unpleasant reminders. Confound a wood box, anyway! Most provoking things they are. Never saw one yet that wasn't empty when you wanted to play ball or go swimming with the gang, nor full when you ought to be studying and were really hungry for an excuse not to.

But the wash shed wasn't altogether bad. Ours had a flat tin roof, you remember, and the rain made music on it, a pattery, cozy, "comfy" sort of music, not shivery and dreadful, like the song the winter wind sang

Our Village

at night about your bedroom windows. Not that kind at all. And the flat shed roof was a bully place to play, being high and dangerous, and generally delightful. It was from the corner of that roof that you flung to the breeze the white cotton flag with your initial, in black, gummed upon it—just the kind of flag displayed by Captain Nemo in “Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.”

You lowered Spotty, the tortoise-shell cat, from that roof in a basket the day after your return from the visit to Boston. You were playing elevator; but Spotty, who apparently did not care for modern conveniences, yowled nervously during the descent and jumped when six feet from the ground.

That wash shed was where you kept the pair of tame rabbits your Aunt Hannah gave you for a birthday present. You didn't keep them there long, however. They were in a wooden box with slats across its open side, and, during the day and night when you and the family drove to Harniss and stayed over at Aunt Hannah's and Uncle Laban's, those

Our House

white rabbits gnawed out of the box and through the door into the kitchen. When you returned you found them beginning operations on the door to the dining room. In a week they would have had a subway from one end of the house to the other.

Spotty didn't approve of the rabbits. She didn't approve of dogs, either. Her rather too frequent kittens were domiciled in a carpet-lined box by the kindling bin, and you let a dog so much as show his nose inside that woodshed door and— Whew!

The man who drove the butcher cart owned a big, no-account dog that considered himself "some punkins." While his master was weighing a pound and a quarter of steak, top of the round, on the scales at the back of the cart, Prince—that was the dog's name—wandered into our yard on a foraging expedition. He approached the back door, tail wagging and nose working expectantly.

"Nice ould Prince!" called Bridget Kelly. She was our washerwoman, bless her Irish heart, and she liked dogs and boys. "Come here, ould feller, and see what I've got for yez."

Our Village

Prince came. He scented a bone, no doubt, and he might have got it if Spotty hadn't been on deck. As it was, Prince's brindle shoulders had scarcely pushed themselves past the jamb when a streak of tortoise-shell lightning struck between those shoulders and stayed there. The air was filled with cat and dog profanity and tufts of brindled hair. Prince reached the road in record time. Perhaps he has stopped running by now—he was an old dog and this happened a good many years ago. Spotty dismounted at the gate, and sauntered back to her kittens, brush-tailed and fiery-eyed, but as dignified as ever. The only time that cat's dignity was shaken was when she attempted to walk across the newly varnished oilcloth covering the kitchen floor. She made the transit finally, but it was a tacky business. For the rest of that day she licked varnish off her paws and made disgusted faces. She seemed to think it a low-down, vulgar trick to play on a lady and a mother.

The kitchen had its attractions—for you, I mean. There was the pump and the cocoanut dipper, and the cool, spicy-smelling closet

Our House

with the cooky jar—at our house it was a mammoth affair which father had brought home from sea filled with tamarind preserve—under the shelf. There was the big range—nobody ever called it anything but “cook-stove,” though—and when mother or grandma made gingerbread or doughnuts you could generally count on a gingerbread horse or a doughnut man to emerge from the pan or kettle, hot and brown and deliciously indigestible.

These, however, were but between-meal refreshments. The dining room was the headquarters of the commissary department, and the dining room at our house was big and light and homey. There were the pictures on the walls, “Signing the Declaration,” “Rock of Ages,” “From Shore to Shore”—*you remember that?* A boat load of people, children in the bow, ma and pa amidships, and grandpa and grandma in the stern, being rowed from a little port straight out to sea, apparently. The children looked happy, but the old folks were pretty blue. Who wouldn’t

Our Village

be? Starting to cross the ocean in a boat no bigger than a dory, and crowded full at that!

The west window of the dining room was filled with plants in pots and on wire racks. Geraniums, callas, fuchsias, begonias, ivies, a carrot scooped out, filled with water, and hung in the sun by strings—that was your contribution to the collection—a sensitive plant that curled up when touched, as if it was ticklish, and a lot more. And at least one canary in a gilt cage. Snuppy's folks had a parrot, but it couldn't sing—only screeched.

Under the floor of that dining room was the cistern, and on rainy days, if you put your ear to the floor, you could hear the water running in. Sometimes they took up the carpet, and there was a trapdoor through which Ezra Bean, a much envied person with whiskers and high rubber boots, descended to clean the cistern. A good manly job was Ezra's, and one that you would cheerfully have attempted yourself if the 'fraid-cats would only have let you.

The meals served in that dining room were— Oh, say! Huckleberry dumpling with cream sauce! Pop-overs and riz biscuits!

Our House

Barberry and sweet-apple preserve! Blackberry pie! Baked bluefish with drawn butter! Um! *Um!* It was there that, for once in your life, you had all the watermelon you wanted at one time. All you wanted for a week. You felt the way grandpa in the "Shore to Shore" picture looked.

When supper was over, that everlasting wood box filled, and the other chores done, you and the folks went into the "settin' room." *Not* the library; of course not. The library was down the road next to the Congregationalist church. It was run by the Ladies' Social Society, and, if your ma paid fifty cents a year and didn't want *all* the books herself, you could go there and get "The Boy Hunters," "The Young Yagers," "Frank on a Gunboat," "Watch and Wait," and a whole shelfful more. People didn't have libraries in houses—no such luck. That room where you went after supper was the "settin' room."



Our Village

There was a table in the settin' room, a round table with a lamp on it. The lamp had a shade made of paper and wire, and there were pictures printed on the paper which showed fine against the light. There were pictures on the walls, too, principally paintings of ships which your father and grandfather had commanded, or perhaps a spatter-work "God Bless Our Home" motto, or a worsted thing called a sampler, made by grandma when she was little.

The settin' room was good in summer, of course, but it was better in winter, with the tall, "air-tight" stove roaring hot, the cat purring beside it, mother in the rocker mending stockings—there always were stockings to be mended at our house, and nobody could ever mend them right but mother—grandma knitting mittens, father—if he happened to be home from a voyage—reading the *Item*, and you curled up on the hassock or cricket, looking over the back numbers of *Godey's Lady's Book*. And outside the hail or snow beat with spiteful and envious fingers against the panes, and the wind screeched

Our House

vain threats concerning what it would do to you if you only dast to come out and face it.

That air-tight stove was a puzzle to you when you were very small and didn't know what was what concerning things. You always hung your stocking beside it on Christmas eve, and on Christmas morning Santa had been there and stuffed that stocking full. He came down the chimney, of course—but how?

It was a miracle, certainly, but now that you are older you realize that there were far greater miracles worked on those Christmas eves. Our house then was a wonder shop of miracles, and love and self-denial were its fairy proprietors. If you could only step back, through forty years or so, and be given a precious moment in which to whisper thanks in the ears long shut to your whisperings! If only you might enter that old settin' room, find it tenanted as it used to be, and tell them of your understanding and your gratitude—ask their forgiveness for petulance and fretful fault-finding! If only— But there!

Our Village

it's nine o'clock—bedtime at our house. We must go upstairs.

The brass hand lamp threw queer, homely shadows of yourself on the walls of the stairway. And the stairs themselves were narrow and steep as the shrouds of a ship or the ladder to heaven. Perhaps they were built that way purposely by great-grandfather, who was an ancient mariner and a deacon of the church. At any rate, to tumble down their almost perpendicular length was as easy, and almost as disastrous, as to fall from grace. You did it once, in your baby days, with a china rabbit in your hand, and, with the blood streaming from a cut in your cheek, announced that the "wabbit was all bwoke and you were bwoke, too." This was a family tradition in our house; so also was the tale of grandfather's fall, on a Sunday, when he had his new go-to-meetin' suit on. The suit was split in conspicuous and sundry places, and grandpa said——

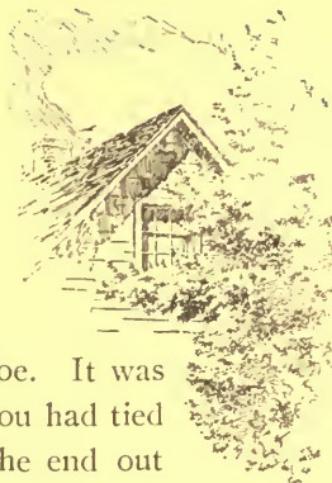
The little room with the funny window under the eaves was your room. The bed with the painted flowers on its headboard was

Our House

your bed. The washstand with the pitcher and bowl was yours. Through that window on shiny nights the moonbeams streamed and made queer, moving patterns on the straw matting or the braided rag mat. Through that window you were once very nearly yanked bodily by one big toe. It was the night before the Fourth, and you had tied a string to the toe and thrown the end out of the window for Snuppy to pull, when he should come at two o'clock, and wake you up. It woke you; you remember the waking distinctly.

Through that window, too, the sound of the distant surf used to drone on summer evenings. Against its little panes the leaves of the "black heart" cherry tree scratched whisperingly when the breeze stirred them. Its casement rattled defiant drumbeats in answer to the battle cry of the winter gale.

On such a night, when the water in the pitcher was freezing, and the snow sifting under the warped sash, mother used to come tip-



Our Village

toeing in to see if you were well tucked up. The lamp was in her hand and her hair sparkled and glistened in the shine of it. And when she saw you were awake she smiled and bent over and . . .

The next room was her room—mother's room. Through the open door we see the little table by the window, the table with father's picture and the vase of pansies on it. There is the Testament with the bead-worked bookmark. And the high, old-fashioned bureau with its sweet, clean smell of lavender; the work basket and the rocking-chair with the figured chintz cushion; the rickety footstool, made by you with your first box of tools—a wabbly, unreliable piece of furniture, but to her more precious than rare old Chippendale, because you made it.

The remarkable feature of grandma's room was the long, low, dark closet under the eaves, a poky, weird tunnel, which, seen dimly by lamplight, was full of old bonnets and trunks and shadows. There was the umbrella with the carved ivory handle, which Uncle Laban brought from Calcutta ever so many years

Our House

ago. It was much too nice to use, so grandma kept it carefully rolled up in its case. When she died, its silk covering was found to have rotted with age until every crease was a line of emptiness. The little armchair used by Aunt Jane when she was a baby was in that closet. So was her big china doll with the beady black eyes and black plaster hair; it was dressed like Lucy in the Rollo books—low-necked, sleeveless gown, pantalets, and slippers, all complete. Grandpa's Sunday tall hat hung above it on a peg. To you that closet was a sort of family vault. My! how dismal and dead and lonesome it looked—and smelled.

The “company” who visited our house always had good times—during the day. When night came they had your sincere pity. You knew they were entombed alive in that icy sepulcher, labeled “The Best Spare Room.” They were sunk fathoms deep in a sea of feather bed, and kept down by counterpane, blanket, “log-cabin” quilt, “rising-sun” quilt, “crazy” quilt, “diamond” quilt, and a half dozen other quilts, the names of which are forgotten. Every time one of the family

Our Village

“drew” a quilt at the church fair, they put it on the bed in the spare room. They called them “comforters”—this was sarcasm.

Under the feather bed was a cornhusk mattress that rustled like a rat’s nest in a pile of shavings. And under that was the corded framework of the bedstead, each cord with a separate squeak, and the whole affair sagging down in the middle like an old-fashioned hammock. A night in that bed was distinctly not a restful experience, though it did have its value as a means of exercise. The sunken center grew warm, after you had hung in it a while, but it was as cramping as a meal bag and when you climbed the heights at each side, they were cold as snow banks and you had to cling to the rails to keep from sliding down again. Cousin Alpheus, who weighed two hundred and eighty, slept in that bed once. Next morning he declared he was all bruises, because every time he fell asleep and “let go his holt” he rolled downhill and hit the floor in the middle.

Our House

One of the choice bits in the spare room was the “barrel armchair.” Uncle Henry—the one who was drowned at sea—made it himself “out of his own head” and a receipt in the paper. He took a flour barrel and sawed it out and put a seat in it and covered it with nice gay-colored stuff and put rockers on it. When you sat in it the rounded back pushed your shoulders together and “hunched” you over in a heap. Grandpa sat in it once; then he took it up to the spare room, along with the dressing table made of a dry-goods box covered with dotted muslin.

The walls of the spare room were cheerfully adorned with pictures and things. A wreath from Cousin Elijah’s coffin dipped in wax and inclosed in a walnut case; his name, a lock of his hair, and the date of his death in the center of the wreath. A shell-worked basket in a deep, shell-covered frame; some of the shells had fallen out and the plaster of Paris showed. An oil painting of great-grandfather, painted by Asaph Doane, the sign painter; Asaph had unusual talent—everybody said so, and the portrait proved it. There were other

Our Village

portraits, too, mainly daguerreotypes, with rings and necklaces realistically "put in" with gilt paint. At Snuppy's house they had a framed set of coffin plates—relics of family funerals—hung in the spare room. This added an appropriate touch to the apartment.

The front stairs of our house were as steep as the everyday set which caused grandpa's accident. They led down to the dark, musty-smelling front hall, with the mahogany hat rack and the model of the full-rigged ship set in a sea of painted putty. From this hall a door opened into— Hush! be reverent, please; this isn't Sunday, and we have no right to be here—into the PARLOR. It was always thus capitalized at our house.

You got into the PARLOR so seldom that your memory of it ought to be hazy—but it isn't. A man who has been in jail but once doubtless remembers it perfectly, and you were in the parlor twenty times at least. Once at Mary's wedding, once when the minister called, once at Cousin Elijah's funeral, and, oh, yes—once or twice at house-cleaning

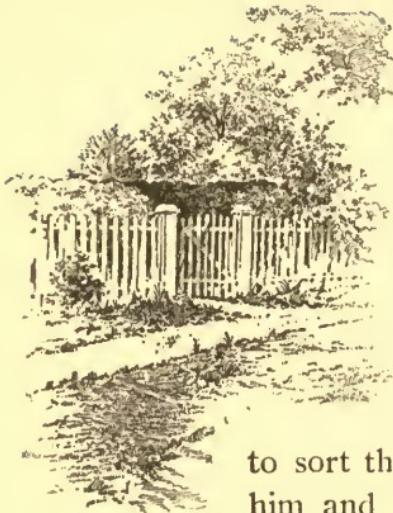
Our House

times. You were driven out promptly then by mother and grandma, who, in long aprons and in sweeping caps, were officiating as high priests in this holy of holies. But you remember the "haircloth set" and the marble-topped center table, and the wainscot, and the wax fruit on the mantel, and the alabaster candlesticks, and the melodeon, of course!

All the melodeons you have heard since sounded like the patent rocker—only worse. But the one at our house, as you remember it, was different somehow. In the old days, on a rare Sunday afternoon when Uncle Laban's folks drove over from Harniss, and Cousin Mary put her feet on the carpet-covered pedals and opened the book of "Gospel Hymns, No. 1," with father and mother and grandma and Uncle Labe and Aunt Hannah and Ed and Tom and you, all standing up to sing. . . . Well, have you ever heard such music as the old melodeon made then? Have you ever heard "In the Sweet By and By" sung like that since? Or will you ever hear it so sung again?

"We shall meet on that beautiful shore."

Our Village



How many of those who sung those words have journeyed to that shore!

You went back to our house last summer. But somehow it wasn't our house that you found. The black heart cherry tree had grown old and been cut down. The post-office building, where grandpa used to sort the mail, and you used to watch him and wish that you might be a real live postmaster some day, had been moved away. They told you it was a blacksmith's shop now. You took their word for it; you had no desire to investigate.

There was a wide porch shading the parlor windows. And not only were the blinds of those windows thrown back, but the windows themselves were open. And the front door—the sacred front door—was open, too, and through it strolled a flannel-shirted summer boarder smoking a pipe. A *pipe* in the PARLOR at our house! No wonder the box hedges had grown bald and gray! No wonder the

Our House

place which used to look so big and tall and fine now seemed so shabby and mean. No, our house is *our* house no longer.

And yet, at night, as you strolled by it, with the scent of the lilacs hanging in the heavy, moist air, and the surf sounding as it used to sound, far off and lazy, and the charitable dark covering the changes of years, then—then it almost seemed . . .

Almost—yes; but not quite. Never again quite. The loved faces have vanished and the loved voices are silent. And, as you longingly looked and listened, the PARLOR windows lighted up and some one began singing “Poor John” to a banjo accompaniment. And suddenly you remembered that it was ten o’clock and your wife had warned you that the night air was bad for your rheumatism.

A CAPE COD CLAMBAKE



A CAPE COD CLAMBAKE

WHY, of course! You know all about it. It was such a lark! The De Lanceys invited you and you went with Clarence and mamma in the auto. The tables were arranged on the verandas of the De Lancey "beach house," and the Van Snubs were there, and the Bonds, and, oh, ever so many more. The lawns were so green and velvety, and the flower beds so trim and exquisite, and the Sound so blue and lovely.

The De Lanceys are the *nicest* people! Exclusive, of course, but— If it hadn't been for the "No trespassing" signs, and those horrid excursion boats whistling back and

Our Village

forth, you might have imagined yourself miles away from anything coarse or common. And the De Lancey silver! And the little necks! And the clam bouillon! And—

Yes. Well, that isn't the kind of clambake I'm talking about. And I don't mean the other kind, either — where you pay seventy-five cents for a dingy slip of green pasteboard and elbow yourself into a pavilion roofed with dirty canvas, and fight for a wooden chair at a table covered with a soiled cloth, and have a dish of cold shells, filled with leather and sand, thrown at you by a husky pugilist in his shirt sleeves, while the fakirs yell and the merry-go-round toots and Mrs. Solomons argues shrilly that little Jacob ought to eat free because he is only "goin' on six, s'elp me," and— No, I should say not.

The clambake I mean comes into being somewhat after this fashion: You are summering, let us say, at a village "down on the Cape," a lazy old village where the houses and roads and sails are white, and the trees and grass and shutters and city boarders green, and the sea and sky and the natives—

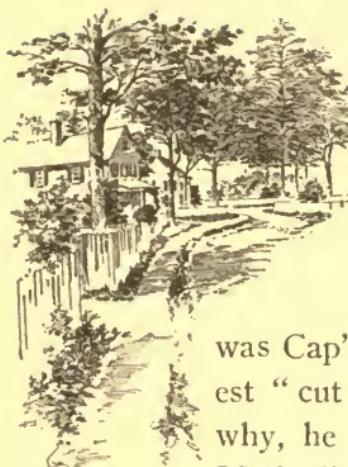
A Cape Cod Clambake

most of them—true blue. And you have bathed and fished and sailed and smoked and loafed—have done almost everything, in fact, except work. There *are* people on Cape Cod who work, but the average “summerer”—no matter what grim resolutions he may have subscribed to before leaving home—is not one of them.

So, one morning, as you are industriously filling your pipe—I am now supposing you to be a member of the tobacco blessed sex—on the porch, your wife emerges from the cottage with a wistful, unsatisfied look in her eye, and observes: “Oh, dear! I do wish we might have a real, old-fashioned clambake.”

Whereupon you sit up in the hammock, choke down your excitement, and reply in an uninterested tone: “Clambake, my dear? Why, we had clams for dinner only yesterday.”

“Yes, I know; but they taste so different baked out of doors. I mean a real clambake on the beach. One with corn and potatoes and all the ‘fixin’s,’ such as we used to have when father was alive.”



Our Village

Now, your wife is, like yourself, a Cape Codder born. She used to live in the old Baker house on the "lower road"—the one occupied at present by that Portuguese family—and her father was Cap'n Ezra Baker, and he was the greatest "cut up" for a grown man that ever—why, he just *had* to be a Universalist. No Methodist, in those days, could go on picnics and get up hay rides and "times" as he did every week day of his "shore leaves," and retain a regular standing in the church. No, sir! One couldn't enjoy life like that and be godly. As old Deacon Bradley said once in prayer meeting: "We have them amongst us, O Lord, who imagine this earthly pilgrimage be a vain thing. But let 'em beware and flee to the ark of safety, while there is yet time. There'll be no straw-ridin' and didoes over there. Let 'em, I say, take heed to—"

Just here your wife interrupts your meditations. She says:

"The children would enjoy it so."

Bless the children! They are the most con-

A Cape Cod Clambake

venient excuses in creation. Probably, if it were not for them, you wouldn't get to the zoological gardens or the aquarium or the fairy play oftener than once a year or so. And as for the circus—but that's an old story.

So you look becomingly benign and parental and observe:

"That's so. It would please them, wouldn't it? I'll step over and see Jones."

Jones has a cottage down the road a bit, and you find him sitting on the porch and looking resentfully at the lawn mower. He has firmly resolved to cut the front yard that morning, and is therefore glad to see you. If the grass isn't cut while the dew is on it, the cutting must go over until the next day. You obligingly remain until the dew is all gone and he is then in a condition to agree to anything. Besides, hasn't he children, too?

Yes, indeed, he will be glad to help get up a clambake. So will the Smiths and the Robinsons. Therefore, so much being decided upon, you repair to Uncle Seth's to consult concerning tides, weather, and the like.

Our Village

You couldn't have a clambake without Uncle Seth. Nor without Aunt Tempy, either, for that matter. They live on the "lower road," too, and Uncle Seth was Cap'n Ezra's second cousin.

Aunt Tempy won't shake hands because it is baking day and her hands are all flour, but she says Uncle Seth is out weeding the cranberry swamp and that he'll be "real tickled" to see you. So to the cranberry swamp you go and find Uncle Seth on his knees. He looks from the rear to be mainly whiskers and straw hat; but between the whiskers and the hat brim is a weather-beaten, tanned old face that wrinkles into a smile of welcome.

"Clambake?" says Uncle Seth. "Well, I declare, I dunno. There's precious nigh a fortn't's work on this swamp, and my hayin' ought to be done besides. I swan, seems 's if we'd had so much wet weather lately that I ain't had a chance to do nothin' scarcely. Yus, yus; I'd like to go fust rate, but I declare I'm 'fraid I can't spare the time."

You suggest that it would please the chil-

A Cape Cod Clambake

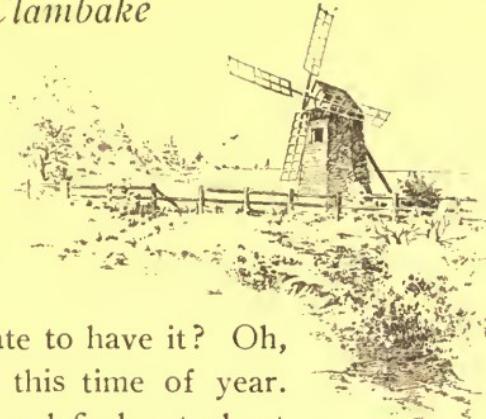
dren. Uncle Seth is an old fish, but he rises to the bait.

"Yus, yus," he says. "Twould suit them, I don't doubt. Well, I dunno. When d'you cal'late to have it? Oh, 'most any day's all right this time of year. Let's go up to the house and find out about the tides."

The "Old Farmer's Almanac" hangs on the nail behind the "settin'-room" door. It is dogs' eared and crumpled, although but seven or eight months old. Uncle Seth wipes his "nigh-to" spectacles and wets his thumb.

"Hum," he says, turning the leaves with the wet thumb. "Let's see. To-day's the fourteenth, ain't it? High tide to-day at three. That makes it low water at nine. Day after to-morrow it's low at eleven or thereabouts. How'd day after to-morrow suit ye?"

It suits you, and you so affirm. But Uncle Seth's conscience still troubles him. There is that cranberry bog and that hay. Aunt Tempy comes to the rescue.



Our Village

"Oh, go 'long, Seth!" she urges. "You ain't had a day off, I dunno when. One good time won't put you in the poorhouse. I'd like a clambake fust rate. My! my! what a lot we used to have when Ezry was alive and home from sea. That's right. He'll go. I'll make him. Tell the children I'll have some apple puffs ready."

A clambake wouldn't be a clambake without Aunt Tempy's apple puffs. You carry the good news home, and are received like a conquering hero. The children proceed to behave like small imps and your wife wears a beatific smile. Jones comes over to say that Robinson has a cousin from Buffalo visiting him who has never eaten a clam in his life, and doesn't know whether he'll like them or not. However, he'll risk the experiment.

Next day the sky is overcast and cloudy and the gloom thereof descends upon the household. The children run to you and their mother at five-minute intervals demanding to know if it is "going to clear off." Jones comes down from the post office at noon with

A Cape Cod Clambake

the Boston daily paper, and the Government's hired prophets cheer you with: "Weather for New England, Thursday: showers and fresh easterly winds." Robinson and the Buffalo cousin—whose name, by the way, is Brown—drop in after dinner to remark that they are "afraid it's all off." At last, in desperation, you go down to the "lower road" and Uncle Seth.

Uncle Seth gets up from the supper table and comes out into the yard. With shirt-sleeved arms akimbo he stands and gazes at the sky, at the western horizon, and at the weather vane on the barn. Then he makes proclamation as follows:

"Wall, I dunno. Looks kind of how-come-you-so-now, don't it? Depends on how the wind holds. It's blowed from the sou'east all day, but seems to be cantin' 'round more to the south'ard. If she hauls 'round to the west more, I shouldn't wonder if it faired off by day. Good no'thwest wind's what I'd like to see. There was spider webs on the grass this mornin' and, gin'rally speakin', you don't see them in a spell of real bad weather. I kind

Our Village

of cal'late she'll haul 'round. Anyway, we won't say die yet."

That's the kind of weather prophet for you. You return home feeling that if the weather next day should be bad it won't be Uncle Seth's fault. He has done his best.

And, sure enough, next morning it has "faired off." The wind has "hauled 'round" to a little north of west and the bay is a bright sapphire blue, sprinkled with flakes of white. You harness the horse into the "democrat" and help your wife in. The children and the lunch baskets are aboard long ago.

The Joneses are waiting in their wagon at the corner of the "shore road." The Smiths and Robinsons have gone on ahead. As you reach the top of the hill by the windmill the whole panorama of beach and bay is before you. The white sand along the shore, streaked, at highwater mark, with lines of dark-green seaweed; the weather-beaten fish shanties and the pines at Rocky Point; the fish weirs on the horizon; the deep-blue water beyond; and, between you and them, a mile or more of clean yellow and white flats and eel-

A Cape Cod Clambake

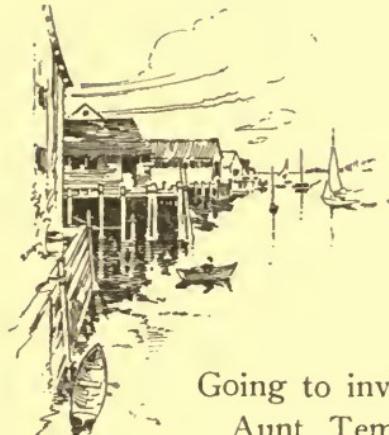
grass-bordered channels. There is, so they say, but one other place along our coast where the tide goes out as far as it does just here. And no one knows exactly where that place is.

There is a hail behind you, and here come Uncle Seth and Aunt Tempy in the carryall. The children set up a whoop.

"All hands on deck!" roars Uncle Seth. "Faired off fine, ain't it? What'd I tell ye? Hello there, young ones! Got your appetites along?"

One of the boys takes down the bars in the rail fence and you leave the road and drive across the marshes. The wind is cool and smells of salt. You reach the "wading place," ford the creek, and emerge upon the beach near the point. And here are the Smiths and the Robinsons, with hoes and baskets and Buffalo cousin, all complete.

The horses are unharnessed and tethered in the shade of the abandoned fishhouses. You may have wondered why Uncle Seth and Aunt Tempy came in the carryall instead of the buggy. You cease to wonder when Aunt



Our Village

Tempy unloads the boxes and bundles. There are enough of these to fill an ordinary wagon.

"For Heaven's sake!" exclaims Mr. Brown of Buffalo.

"That isn't all lunch, is it?"

Going to invite the town to dinner?"

Aunt Tempy smiles tolerantly. "You've never been to a clambake afore, have you?" she asks. "Humph! Well, *I* have."

"Turn to, you lubbers!" orders Uncle Seth. "Clam-diggers, fall in. Women folks, do what they feel like doin'. Young ones, fetch wood and get rockweed."

"Oh, don't make 'em fetch wood yet a while, 'Seth," says Aunt Tempy. "There's time enough. They'll want to see the clams dug."

The experienced diggers are around with three- or four-pronged clam hoes and wooden buckets. Uncle Seth, being a professional, has a couple of "dreeners," crates made of laths with handles of rope; Cousin Brown is proudly brandishing a garden hoe.

A Cape Cod Clambake

"What you cal'late to do with that thing?" asks Uncle Seth. "Weed pertaters?"

Mr. Brown affirms that he intends digging clams with it.

"Sho! Land of love! You'll chop 'em into hash, let alone breakin' your back. You leave that ashore and come along to pick up. There's diggers enough."

But the Buffalo pride is roused and Mr. Brown still clings to his hoe. Shoes and socks are removed and the barefooted brigade marches forth to descend upon the unsuspecting clam, Uncle Seth in the lead.

The flats are just beyond the stretches of spiky sedge grass. Uncle Seth's toughened soles brush the spikes aside or tramp them down, but the tenderfoot rear guard performs involuntary war dances and utters stifled but emphatic remarks.

"Now," says the commander, at length, "here's as good a place as any. If I was after sea clams I'd go way out yonder back of them weirs; and if I wanted them big run-downs I'd lay to 'bout a quarter mile nigher shore'n that. But for a bake or a bile there

Our Village

ain't nothin' better'n the little sage claims you git along the edge of this grass. Hoe in, all hands!"

Brown wishes to know how you can tell where to dig.

"Well," condescends Uncle Seth, "I'll tell ye. See them holes in the sand? Some of 'em's clam holes and some of 'em ain't. Them that ain't is worms and you don't want 'em. I can 'most gin'rally tell a worm hole from a clam hole, but blessed if I know how I do it. Instinct and sense of smell, I cal'late, same as the old woman knew when the pie was burnt. Come on, now! Hoe in!"

You "hoe in" literally, and the buckets begin to fill. Uncle Seth's "dreeners" fill quicker than the others and he resurrects less of the long, ugly-looking, thousand-legged sandworms. It is blazing hot here on the flats and your ankles and legs begin to turn a picturesque and vivid crimson. Also, along toward the last layers in the bucket, you grow conscious of possessing a back. You turn over successive hoefuls of wet sand, and the youngsters, splashed, dirty, and happy, plunge

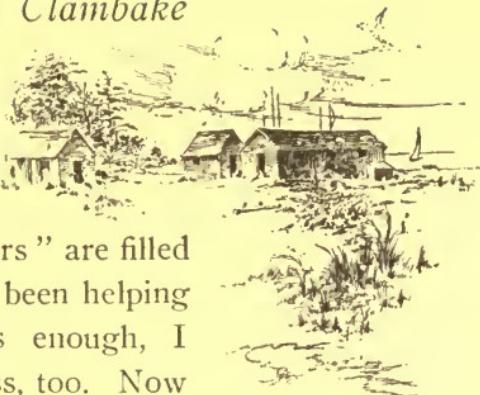
A Cape Cod Clambake

both hands into the hole and pull loose the clams.

"There!" says Uncle Seth, whose "dreeners" are filled long since and who has been helping everyone else, "there's enough, I jedge. Good, likely mess, too. Now we can head for shore. Why, where's—where's Mr. Brown?"

Brown was very energetic when the digging first began. His garden hoe turned over yards and yards of flats and his breathing was like the puffing of a donkey engine. But, somehow, he didn't find many clams. Most of those he did find were mashed, by the sharp edge of the hoe, into pulpy combinations of shell and sand. And now he has disappeared. The youngsters remember that he wandered over behind the point. So all hands begin to shout "Brown!" at the top of their voices.

The answer, when it comes, is somewhat petulant. "Yes, yes! I'm coming. What's the matter with you chaps?"



Our Village

He appears, hopping gingerly through the sedge. But on his sunburned countenance is pride unmistakable.

"I found a fine place in nearer shore there," he declares, "just where that little brook runs down. Look at that."

He displays a half bucket of little black clams, a good deal hashed up by the hoe, and enveloped in a cloak of evil-smelling blue clay.

Uncle Seth inspects the find, sniffs suspiciously and shakes his head. Obviously he doesn't want to hurt the Buffalo relative's feelings, but—

"I'm—I'm kind of 'fraid, Mr. Brown," he says. "'Course you didn't know no better, not havin' experience, but—you see clams that you git out of that sink hole ain't—*Phew!* how they do smell up!"

So Mr. Brown's treasures are discarded and their discoverer limps ashore, one hand on the small of his back, and plainly feeling himself the victim of spite and envy.

The clams—the good ones, not the shells filled with sand that are in some of the buckets—are carefully washed in a channel of clear,

A Cape Cod Clambake

rippling water, and the diggers return to the beach. The "women folks" have not been idle. There is a great pile of driftwood collected—old sun-bleached fragments of wrecks, dead limbs from pine trees, laths from the weirs and the like.

"Fust rate!" says Uncle Seth. "That's a good job done. Ain't got nobody's fence in there, have ye? Land sakes! I remeinber when I was a boy we had a bake and pretty nigh used up all the rails off of Cap'n Benijah Lathrop's fence, and— Humph! I forget that little pitchers have big ears. Guess I'd better be careful. Scatter, you young ones, and tote rockweed. Two or three of you men get stones. I'll dig the hole."

You go along the beach, picking up round, waterworn bowlders the size of your head. Returning with these, you find that Uncle Seth has dug a pit in the sand and is arranging the driftwood within it. Newspaper and shavings beneath, chips and small fragments above, the large limbs and beams on top. Then he lights the fire.

It smokes, crackles, and roars. Then, into

Our Village

the flaming pile are thrown the stones you and the others have brought. More wood and more stones follow. The fire burns down to a mass of red-hot coals. These Uncle Seth removes with a long-handled iron rake. There are the stones, white hot; they hiss, when sprinkled with water, like a flatiron just off the stove.

“Now then,” commands the chef, drawing his shirt sleeve across his perspiring forehead, “where’s that basket, Tempy?”

Aunt Tempy produces, not one basket, but two big ones. From these her husband takes green corn in the husk, new potatoes, and, finally, thirty or more interesting looking little bundles of white cheese cloth.

“What’s them?” he vouchsafes. “Well, son, them’s tinker mack’rel—little ones. I got ‘em from the weir folks. ‘Do ‘em up that way and they go fine with a bake; cook jest right. Now heave in the clams.”

Over the hot stones are poured bucket after bucket of the clean, wet clams. A mighty hissing they make, too.

“Rockweed!” shouts Uncle Seth.

A Cape Cod Clambake

The children have brought big armfuls of bulbous, damp weed, torn from the rocks below tide mark. With this the bake is covered and a square of canvas is laid over all. From beneath it rises a great cloud of steam. Then the canvas is covered with shovelfuls of the coarse beach sand.

"There!" says Uncle Seth. "Now we're just goin' to let her sizzle for half an hour."

While she "sizzles" your wife and Smith's wife and Jones's and Robinson's, supervised and directed by Aunt Tempy, spread the cloths on the green in the shadow of the pines. The lunch baskets are unpacked. Biscuit and pickles and pies and doughnuts and sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs and—and, oh, yes! a half bushel of Aunt Tempy's apple puffs and—you rather sympathize with Brown in his wonder at the supply of eatables; and yet you are conscious of a ravenous appetite.

Jones has brought along the handiest thing. It is a little folding camp stove, made of sheet iron. When it is ready for use it is square,

Our Village

like a box, and you simply pour in a little oil and light it. It will be so nice for boiling the coffee. Coffee, so Jones says, never can be boiled just right over an outdoor wood fire.

You inspect the stove; that is, you inspect part of it, for one side seems to be missing. At last it is found, in the bottom of the wagon, under a lap robe, and the oil is poured in. But somehow or other the wicks won't trim. The stove smokes, smells, and sputters and Jones sputters likewise.

"Want to hurry up with that 'ere coffee," calls Uncle Seth. "Bake's 'most done."

This makes Jones still more nervous, and it is ten minutes more before the stove is ready. And then the coffeepot is lost. It was right here a moment ago and so was the coffee, but—

"Turn to, all hands!" shouts Uncle Seth. "Bake's ready."

He carefully turns back the canvas and rakes off the rockweed; then into pans held by the boys and girls he puts great handfuls of hot clams, ears of corn, potatoes, and the

A Cape Cod Clambake

cloth-wrapped fish. My! how good everything smells.

"If we only had that coffee, now," sighs Jones. "I was as sure I brought it and the coffeepot, too, as I am that I'm living. How on earth—"

There is a shout. Uncle Seth appears, bearing the big coffeepot, steaming and fragrant.

"While you was fussin' with that 'ere stove contraption," he explains, with a twinkle, "I made a chip fire and started her bilin'. Now, pitch in, folks, and eat while the stuff's hot."

Eat? Well, that's what everybody does. The children "pitch in" with both hands and the grown people are not far behind. You remember that Brown has never tasted a clam in his life; he has eaten quahaugs, of course, but they don't count.

He opens a shell, under the supervision of Mrs. Robinson, extracts the clam, dips it in his saucer of melted butter, and chews deliberately.

"Like it?" asks Robinson anxiously.

Our Village

"Don't know yet. Guess I'll have to try another."

He tries another and another and another; eats half a peck or so and decides that he does like clams and will have some more.

"Have another mug of coffee," urges Uncle Seth. "Ain't nothin' the matter with that coffee, is there? Even if 'twas biled out of door."

There is nothing the matter with anything, apparently. The clams are tender and delicious; so, too, is the corn. And as for those "tinker mackerel"! Whew!

At last the doughnut and apple puff stage is reached and you begin to feel that a cigar would be a pleasant wind-up to the feast. But the children are eating yet. Wonderful what appetites they do have down here; eat twice as much as they do at home in the city.

"Land sakes!" says Aunt Tempy, "'course you shall have more pie, if you want it. Let 'em eat, bless their hearts!"

"Young ones are all mouth and holler inside, like a pumpkin lantern, I cal'late," observes Uncle Seth. "I used to be the same

A Cape Cod Clambake

way. Ain't got all over it yet.
Pass them cookies, Tempy, won't
ye?"

Well, you can't eat forever, even at a clambake. Pipe and cigars are going and the "women folks" wash the dishes. The sun sinks toward the west. The fire has gone out and the tide comes in. It creeps over the flats and washes musically among the sedge where you dug the clams. The children are building forts along the shore, vain bulwarks against old Ocean.

Uncle Seth and Aunt Tempy grow reminiscent. They talk of other clambakes in years long gone — when the village was peopled with sea captains, who went away on long voyages and came home occasionally to enjoy themselves with their wives and families.

"'Member that bake 'Lisha Doane got up, Seth?" asks Aunt Tempy. "Not the little one, when Caleb was here, but the big one when he was home for the last time, just afore



Our Village

him and his wife was wrecked and drownded off Hatteras? Much as forty folks there was, old and young, and *such* a good time as we had! Stayed down to supper and then lighted lanterns and danced in the big barn that was standin' then and belonged to Abner Payne."

"Yus, yus," chuckles Uncle Seth. "Dance? I should say we did! 'Twas three o'clock in the mornin' when I got home that time. I was courtin' you then, Tempy, and I drove down to the old house and got you. Do you remember?"

"I guess I do! Mother says: 'Now, Tempy, don't tire yourself all out dancin'.' But dancin' didn't tire folks in them days."

"That's so, it didn't. Seems 's if I could have worked all day and danced all night in them times. I couldn't do it now no more'n nothin'. Must have been more life in the air then."

There is a good deal more of this, but they both agree that "clambakes ain't the fun for folks same as they used to be."

It is sunset, and the western horizon is all



"'I was courtin' you then, Tempy. . . . Do you remember?'"

A Cape Cod Clambake

streaked with red gold and topaz and turquoise. It is time to go home. So the horses are harnessed, the empty baskets and pots and pans are loaded into the wagons, and the procession moves back across the marshes. But now the evening wind is cold and the dusky meadows are lonely, and the frogs are singing plaintive songs of regret and longing. And you think of father and mother and the faces that once met you along the old village streets. Heigho! Whoa, Ned! Hurry up, children. It's bedtime.

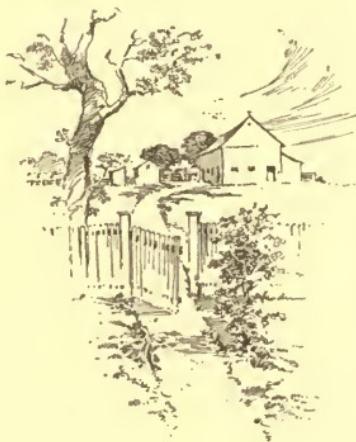
Later in the evening you are conscious that your legs and arms are red hot and that witch hazel is good for sunburn. Also that a dyspepsia tablet or two might prove a restful solace for the clams you have eaten. Robinson limps over to say that Brown is in bed, swathed in cotton and vaseline, and that his ankles are beginning to blister. And, please, what is good for a lame back?

But the children, lobster red though they are, went to bed perfectly happy. No dyspepsia there and no regrets, either. In fact, the youngest, who is so burned that his moth-

Our Village

er is really worried, demanded to know why there couldn't be a clambake every day.

You used to feel that way, too. Now you shudder to think of it. If old Father Time would pause for a while in that everlasting march of his . . . "Folks don't have the good times they used to have." Well, perhaps that's so.



THE OLD MAIDS



THE OLD MAIDS

IT wasn't that old maids were rare in our village. Single ladies of a certain age, who scorned matrimony and were thankful that they were not burdened with husbands and household cares, were plentiful—almost as plentiful as sea captains.

The Widow Cummings's "select boarding-house" was full of them. Miss Harriet Beasley, who presided over the Ladies' Circulating Library, boarded there; so did Miss Olivia Simpson, the school-teacher, and Miss Jane Berry, local leader of the Women's Rights

Our Village

movement, and several more dignified and precise spinsters. Conversation at the Cummings table was conducted on a highly literary and learned plane. It is recorded of Zoeth Labrick, the sexton, one of the few males who "took meals" at the widow's, that, after his first fortnight of select boarding, he drifted into Dr. Hallett's office and asked the doctor if the latter had "ary book around the house that was wrote by Mike L. Angelo, one of them Eyetalians."

" You see, doc," said Zoeth, " Hattie Beasley and the rest have been talkin' about this Angelo critter mealtimes till you can't rest. Asked me what I considered the chief beauty of his 'Moses.' And when I says, ' Moses who?' they giggled. Makes a feller feel like a born fool."

Abitha Doane, the milliner, was a spinster; so was Caroline Pepper, the dressmaker, who lived with her. Caroline looked the part, too, and wore jet earrings and a tan-colored "false front." Either her head had grown or the "front" had shrunk, for the tan area only extended to the tops of her ears and her own

The Old Maids

gray hair stuck out around the edges like trimming. Miss Pepper was an old maid to the fullest extent of the popular meaning of the term, but when the people of our village mentioned "the old maids" they were not speaking of her and Abitha, nor of the boarders at the Cummingses'. They referred to "Pashy and Huldy" Baker. "Pashy and Huldy" were *the* old maids.

The house where the old maids lived was on the Neck Road, beyond the grove known locally as "Elkanah's Pines," and near the swamp where the feather grass grew and the spring bubbled up in the sunken barrel. It was a big, square, old house, standing a good way back from the sidewalk, with high plastered chimneys—the plaster had peeled off in spots so that the red bricks showed—and it had a massive front door with pillars at each side and an arched window above. Your Cousin Ed, who lived in Boston and was going to be an artist some day—after he got through "making the crew" and being conditioned at Harvard—enthused over that house. He said it was a perfect specimen of Colonial

Our Village

architecture. Then he saw the old maids themselves, and promptly declared that they were perfect specimens likewise.

Your earliest memories of the old maids and their home are associated with summer Sunday afternoons and the walks you used to take with grandma. These walks varied a little as to route, but their objective point was always the same, namely, the cemetery. There were many things which the respectable portion of our village considered wicked to do on Sunday, but to walk to the cemetery was not one of these. Grandma liked to go there for various reasons, to carry flowers for Aunt Desire's grave, to see if the man who was paid

one dollar a year for taking care of the family lot was earning his salary, to inspect the new tombstones which were erected from time to time and speculate concerning their cost, and to instill into your young mind the inevitable end of worldly ambition and the necessity of preparation for the hazardous beyond.



The Old Maids

You didn't care much for the cemetery.
There were several epitaphs which fascinated
you for a while, epitaphs like that of

SOLON TYNDALL,

KILLED BY A FALL FROM THE MAIN TOPSAIL
YARD OF THE BARK AMAZON, IN THE
HARBOR OF BUENOS AYRES
ON MARCH 12, 1850

He as a seaman did his duty well,
But his foot slipped and from aloft he fell,
Fell, but to rise and climb the shrouds on high,
And greet his Master with a glad "Aye, aye."

Or that which recorded the fate of

ABSALOM PETERS,

SHOT IN THE CREEK BY THE EXPLOSION
OF HIS OWN GUN.

As grandma when she read this inscription invariably pronounced "creek" like "crick," you associated it with the lumbago, called locally "a crick in the back," and wondered what the unfortunate Absalom was doing with his gun behind him. Later you learned that he was duck-hunting in the creek between East Harniss and our village and had been accidentally shot through the breast.

Our Village

But though the epitaphs soon lost their novelty and the cemetery itself grew to be as tiresome as grandma's sermons, the walks there and back were delightful. You turned in at Cap'n Rogers's side gate, went down through the pasture, by the "peat hole" where the turtles were sunning themselves on the projecting stumps, and climbed the hill on the other side. This hill in winter was the most dangerous, and consequently the most fascinating, coast in town, but now it was a daisy-starred lookout from which you might see for three land miles and fifteen watery ones. Directly beneath you were clumps of huckleberry bushes and scrub oaks, with the path winding through them between the cranberry swamps; beyond was the dusty yellow ribbon of the Neck Road, bordered with gray rail fences or mossy stone walls, with an occasional house, barn, and chicken yard; "Elkanah's Pines" made a velvety green blotch; and the white stones of the cemetery shone in the sun; back of all was the blue bay, a-dance in the wind, with the distant buff sand dunes of the Trumet shore notching the skyline.

The Old Maids

From the hill the old maids' house was conspicuous. Four-squared, solid, and aristocratic, in its day by far the most pretentious dwelling on the Neck Road, it seemed to be holding itself aloof from the common herd, and, secluded behind the two great elms at each side of its door, to be viewing the village with dignified toleration. At this distance one could not see the broken plaster of the chimneys, the lack of paint, the rotting shingles, the fences leaning this way and that. From the hill it appeared eminently genteel; near at hand the shabbiness of the gentility forced itself upon you.

The foot of this hill, near the plank bridge over the cranberry ditch, was the spot where you and grandma were most likely to meet the old maids. You had caught glimpses of them through the huckleberry bushes as you came down the slope. The swamp honeysuckles grew thick about the little bridge, and perhaps that is why you never think of "Pashy and Huldy" without seeming to sniff the perfume of the honeysuckle blooms.

"Pashy"—her right name was Patience,

Our Village

you discovered later, and her sister's, Hulda —was in the lead. She always took the lead when the pair went walking, just as she did in all practical and worldly matters, household cares, and the like. Hulda only led in fashionable conversation, in letter writing, in fancy needlework, and in the discussion of Tom Moore's merits as a poet. So it had been since they were children—Pashy was the caretaker and business manager; Huldy the social star, the family pet, and ornament.

This distinction showed in the manner in which the sisters dressed. Both wore garments which had been the fashion ten or fifteen years before, but Pashy's were plain and businesslike, while Huldy's were more pretentious and inclined toward a middle-aged and very respectable coquetry. It was Pashy who wore the shoulder kerchief and the plain bonnet of a coal-scuttle pattern, which in cold weather was exchanged for a quilted hood. Her hair was parted in the middle and brushed back at each side. Huldy wore curls and a hat which tied with ribbons beneath her chin; a figured cashmere shawl was thrown

The Old Maids

over her shoulders, and about her neck was a red coral necklace. Her lace collar was fastened with a large cameo pin, and there was a gold ring on her finger, and what grandma called "danglets" of red coral dependent from her ears.

Huldy carried a faded blue silk parasol, neatly patched and mended in a dozen places, and Pashy bore an ancient and pudgy green umbrella and a flowered carpet-bag with a pair of leather handles. The contents of that carpet-bag seldom varied, and could have been itemized from memory by every adult and nearly every child in our village. There were the two clean handkerchiefs—a plain one for Pashy and an embroidered one for Huldy; a bottle for smelling salts, empty; a leather purse, containing very little except two large house keys, those of the front and back doors; a little silk bag with some bits of sugared flag-root in it; and always on Sunday afternoons a plump envelope stamped precisely in the upper right-hand corner, and addressed to the niece who lived in New Orleans.

Writing this letter to the far-off niece was

Our Village

a Sabbath ceremony as regular and almost as solemn as going to church, for the old maids. Huldy sat down to the mahogany desk with the rickety, twisted legs, and unlocked the inlaid writing case, which her father, pompous old Cap'n Darius Baker, had brought home from Genoa when she was a child. Pashy sat beside her sister, holding in her lap a copy of "The Gentlewoman's Complete Letter Writer." Between them, on the floor, lay Dr. Johnson's ponderous dictionary.

Huldy looked at her sister, took up the pearl-handled pen which had come with the writing case, and drew a long preparatory breath. Pashy returned the look and also drew a long breath. Then Huldy dipped the pen in the ink well and wrote at the top of the sheet of note paper:

BELOVED NIECE : I take my pen in hand to inform you that my dear sister and I are well and we trust and pray that this may find you the same.

The letter, thus begun, continued for exactly eight pages. It was filled with such bits of village news as had reached the ears of the

The Old Maids

sisters, together with a careful notation of the household doings, how many eggs the hens had laid, the number of pears on the ancient Bartlett tree, and similar items, all couched in the stilted language of the "Complete Letter Writer," and ornamented with such quotations from Moore's poems as Huldy considered appropriate.

The next step, following the completion of the letter, was to take it to the post office, in order that it might be sure to go out on the early mail Monday morning, and this trip to the office, via the same "short cut" which you and grandma took on the way to the cemetery, was the occasion of your meeting the old maids with such regularity at the little bridge.

The conversation at these meetings did not vary greatly.

"Land sakes!" grandma would exclaim, under her breath, "here's the old maids. Thought 'twas about time. They're as sure as death and taxes." Then aloud: "Good morning, Pashy. How d'ye do, Huldy? Nice seasonable weather we're having. I presume likely you're going up to mail your letter."

Our Village

The old maids acknowledged the greeting, each in her individual manner.

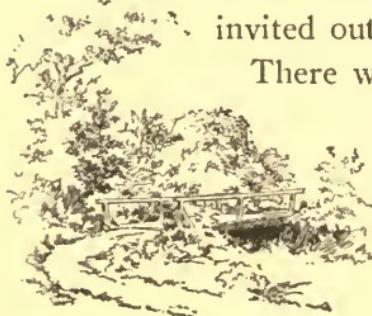
"Good afternoon," said Pashy briskly.
"Yes, we're going to the post office to——"

"To insert our epistle in the receptacle for postal matter," concluded Huldy graciously.
"The weather is indeed delightful. As the bard has said——"

What the bard said cannot be recalled at the moment. However, it doesn't matter; he was sure to have said something appropriate to any and all topics. The old maids passed on and grandma looked after them.

"Cat's foot!" she exclaimed. "Don't they beat the Dutch? A body would think they were King Solomon's nighest relations, and yet it's just as likely as not they don't have a full meal of victuals from one week's end to the other—that is, unless they're invited out."

There was truth in grandma's observation, but on the one memorable occasion when you and mother took tea



The Old Maids

with the old maids the grandeur of the ceremony overshadowed any shortage in the commissary department. The table was set in the dining room, of course, the old-time, low-studded dining room, with its yellow wood-work, which had once been white, with its tall clock in the corner and the braided rag mats on the floor, with its chairs at equal distances along the walls, and each set so exactly in its habitual place that there were little marks on the floor which the legs fitted into.

Everything was years and years old and far behind the times; even the tall clock, which, so Pashy explained, was two hours and a quarter slow, but, as she and her sister were used to it and always figured accordingly, it really didn't make much difference. The clock, by the way, exhibited above its face a painted marine scene, where a ship behind a ridge of tin waves rocked steadily with every swing of the pendulum.

The dishes were blue and white, with pictures of pagodas and funny little bridges upon them. The teacups had no handles—that is,

Our Village

they were made without them—and both Pashy and Huldy drank their tea from the saucers instead of the cups themselves; the air with which Huldy sipped hers, holding the saucer in her left hand, with the little finger stiffly extended, was inimitable and impressive. The milk pitcher was yellow, and upon its side was a picture of the death of Washington, the great George being lifted from his bed by four angels with spreading wings and radiant halos, up to a mass of tumbled clouds which seemed to betoken a coming thunder-storm.

There were pictures on the walls, pictures of ships at sea or of scenes in foreign ports. Aworsted "sampler," made by Pashy when a schoolgirl, was framed and hung among them; so, too, was Cap'n Baker's certificate of membership in the Boston Marine Society, and the coat of arms of the Baker family, done in screaming water colors. Also there was a large colored print of the battle between the *Constitution* and the *Guerrière*. The *Constitution* flew a tremendous battle flag, the red and blue of which not only cov-

The Old Maids

ered the banner but a liberal section of adjacent sky.

Pashy pronounced a solemn and lengthy blessing, to which her sister, from the foot of the table, responded with a devout "Amen." Then Pashy poured the tea, Huldy passed the bread and butter, and the meal began.

It was a quaint, old-fashioned meal, the food not too abundant, but everything very good indeed. There were caraway-seed cookies and sweet-apple and barberry preserves, and tiny cranberry tarts, sweetened with molasses instead of sugar. And, while you ate, the old maids and mother talked, talked of the minister's latest sermon and of the weather and of grandfather's health. Huldy embellished the conversation with quotations from Dr. Johnson and Tom Moore, and gave unqualified testimonial to the benefit derived from "Indian Bitters," a cure-all, the receipt for which had been handed down from her grandparents. Also she spoke of *Godey's Lady's Book* as the one periodical suited to the literary needs of a genteel family.

"We used to take," she added, a tinge of

Our Village

regret in her voice, “*Gleason’s Monthly Pictorial*, but that was when father was alive. We don’t take it now. It—it isn’t what it used to be.”

Now the *Pictorial* was still a revered visitor at your house, therefore you were surprised when mother acquiesced with a prompt “No, certainly not.”

One element of tea-table chat was conspicuously lacking, that is, gossip. The old maids never gossiped—gossip was not genteel.

After supper you went into the sitting room. And there, amidst staid, heavy pieces of mahogany furniture and bits of bric-a-brac from China and Japan and India, under inspection by rows of stiff portraits in oil, you sat and wriggled while mother and the old maids talked and talked and talked.

Huldy said good-by in the sitting room, but Pashy came to the door. There she and mother whispered for a few moments. You caught fragments like: “Yes, the shawl will be done in a week if I can work nights; my eyes aren’t what they used to be.” “Yes, we *should* be thankful for the potatoes, but, of

The Old Maids

course, we couldn't *think* of letting you *give* them to us. We are not dependent upon charity, thank goodness." And, "Please don't let Huldy know I told you this. She is so deli-



cate, and has been through so much, poor child, that I try to carry most of the load myself. But sometimes it is awful hard."

Then you went away into the shadows of the starry night, wondering and thinking.

Our Village

After you had passed the cemetery and felt safe enough to relax your grip on mother's hand, you asked her many questions, but she would not answer them, always changing the subject. So you knew there was a mystery concerning the old maids—a secret known to mother and grandma, and perhaps all the "grown-ups," but not to little boys.

Well, you know the secret now. The romance you suspected was there, but it was such a sordid, pitiful romance; hardly worth the telling, it may be, except for the fact that it contained a great surprise. And the surprise was this:

The old maids were not old maids at all! That is, one of them was not. Huldy had been married; she was a widow.

Cap'n Darius Baker was a great man in his day. One of the magnates of our village he was, after he retired from sea, and drove a span and gave liberally to the church and for town improvements. After his election to the State Legislature the big house on the Neck Road was filled with guests whom the cap'n brought down from Boston, and there were

The Old Maids

parties and dinners galore. Once—it was grandma's pet story—the Governor visited our village, and it was Cap'n Baker who entertained him and, at the ball that evening, Cap'n Baker's daughter Huldy who led the march with the great man.

Pashy and Huldy were girls at that time, but then, as later, it was Pashy who attended to the household duties and Huldy who shone in the social gayety. Mrs. Baker had died when her youngest daughter was born, and upon Patience, the elder, fell the care of the establishment and its servants—three of them, more than any other house in the community could boast of. Pashy was plain and practical; Huldy rather pretty and poetical. Huldy was her father's spoiled darling, and Pashy, without jealousy, assisted in the spoiling.

Cap'n Darius, though respected and envied, was not a universal favorite. He was considered pompous and "stuck up," and people said that he held himself above "common folks." At any



Our Village

rate he certainly did seem to consider his daughters too good for the village young men who came to call upon them, and some of these young men were promising skippers of full-rigged ships, and "catches" whom many *a scheming parent had marked and laid traps for. So, though the girls—Huldy in particular—had many would-be beaux, no one of the latter could be picked out by the gossips as "steady company" for either of the sisters.

And then came the count. This is the only recorded instance of the coming of nobility to our village, and it created a sensation which extended over the whole county. On the first Sunday when Huldy Baker entered the meeting house upon the arm of the titled foreigner, Parson Simpkins's reading of the Scripture stopped for an instant, and the buzz of excited interest which stirred the congregation reminded its older members of the time when Araminta Penniman marched up the aisle with her bonnet on "hind side before."

The count, so it appeared—his name is forgotten now, and you never heard it pro-

The Old Maids

nounced twice alike by those who pretended to remember it—was an Italian nobleman visiting this country on a pleasure trip. He had met Cap'n Darius at a dinner in Boston, and the cap'n, with customary enterprise, had seized upon him and brought him home for an over-Sunday stay. People, supposed to be up in such matters, remarked that he was “dead gone on Huldy already.”

Apparently he was, for he came again and again, until, finally, the engagement was announced. The wedding was the swellest affair ever known on the Cape, and, so the *Item* said, was attended by “a galaxy of beauty and chivalry which would have done honor to the proudest capitals of Europe.” None of the count’s relatives were present, but that was not expected—Italy was a long way off in those days. The bridal couple departed, via the Boston packet, on their honeymoon journey to—well, anywhere, from the pyramids of Egypt to Niagara Falls, according to who told the story. Cap'n Baker returned to the Legislature, Pashy remained at home to keep house as usual, and our vil-

Our Village

lage rubbed its eyes and settled back to await developments.

They came within a year. Of course everyone who reads this has already foreseen the miserable *dénouement*. But cables were unknown and newspapers scarce then, so tales of bogus counts and their wiles had not been printed broadcast to serve as warnings for aspiring fathers and ambitious young women. The count wasn't a count at all. He wasn't even an Italian, but hailed from somewhere in the South and had a wife and daughter living in New Orleans. Anxious letters from the forsaken wife led to the disclosure and the consequent scandal. Our village stopped work for a week, to gather at the sewing circle and the post office and whisper rumors and surmises.

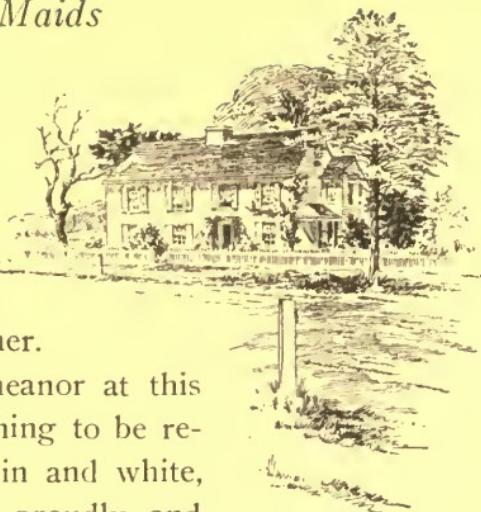
The rumors became certainties, and more rumors trod upon the heels of the first. Huldy had come back to her father at Boston. The count was in jail somewhere. Cap'n Baker was in financial difficulties; he had been speculating and had lost all his money; the marriage with the supposedly rich nobleman

The Old Maids

had been arranged by him with a hope that his son-in-law's wealth might help him out of his troubles. Huldy was very sick. There was talk of arresting her father.

They say Pashy's demeanor at this dreadful time was something to be remembered. She grew thin and white, but she bore herself as proudly and went about her work as bravely as when the family name was clean and unsmirched. She went to church each Sunday and sat in the Baker pew, and those who would fain have sympathized with her did not dare do so, any more than the meaner souls who would have liked to gloat over her downfall dared sneer in her presence.

Then came the final crash. Cap'n Darius committed suicide in a Boston hotel, and Huldy, weak, worn, and crushed, came to our village with the body. Even then Pashy did not openly give way, but sheltered her sister from curious eyes and took upon her own



Our Village

shoulders all the worry and anxiety of the months that followed.

So that is the story of the old maids. All their lives they lived in the old house, amidst the treasures collected during their father's prosperity, and no one but a very few knew—though many guessed—how hard was the struggle for even the necessities of life, and how they sewed and crocheted and knit far into the nights to make the articles they sold to the townspeople and the summer visitors. And to fewer still was known how steadfastly Pashy bore her burden and how she refused charity and sacrificed her own comfort and actual needs to humor her weaker sister. The "niece" in New Orleans was the count's daughter. Huldy felt a curious and deep-rooted sympathy for this girl, whose father had wronged her, and the letter every Sunday was faithfully written and faithfully mailed until the hands which wrote and mailed it were still forever.

The old maids died years ago, before you left our village. Pashy, worn out, died first, and Huldy, entirely at sea without her pro-

The Old Maids

tector and guide, followed in a few months. She left the house and its contents to the New Orleans "niece," but no sooner was she in her grave than, behold, a swarm of hitherto unheard-of relatives appeared—cousins three or four times removed—and they fought over the will like sharks over a dead whale. There were auction sales at which the blue china cups and saucers and the spinning wheels and warming pans, the mahogany furniture and the gilt-framed mirrors, were sold at prices which would have kept the old maids in comfort for years. But to sell articles which belonged to "father" was not Pashy's way; she would have worked herself to death first.

The house on the Neck Road is now occupied by a Portuguese family, who pick cranberries and go out "choring" and washing. One day during a recent summer, as you were strolling by, you saw three of the little Portuguese children—goodness knows how many of them there are—playing at "keeping house" in the yard. They had a lean-to of boards, and it was furnished, after a fashion, with broken-down doll's furniture donated by some

Our Village

kind-hearted summer resident. There was a piece of looking-glass tacked on the walls of the playhouse and what appeared to be a framed picture. But it wasn't a picture—it was the worsted " sampler " that hung on the walls of the dining room that evening when you took tea with the old maids.

You bought that sampler and you have it yet. To you it is fragrant with the scent of wild honeysuckle and of sugared flagroot, of the summer Sunday walks with grandma, and memories of " Pashy and Huldy."

THE SCHOOL PICNIC



THE SCHOOL PICNIC

I PRESUME that few, if any, of those present have ever attended a school picnic. Wait—wait just a minute, please! Kindly keep your seats. Don't attempt to protest all at the same time. The chairman has accorded me the privilege of the floor and I do not intend relinquishing it until I have made my speech. As I was about to say when interrupted—I presume that few, if any, of those present

Our Village

have ever attended a school picnic, such as a wise committee used to provide yearly for the children in our village.

I do not mean a Sunday-school picnic. There! Now will you be quiet? Certainly we had Sunday-school picnics; our society always had one, and so did the Baptists and the Congregationalists and the Methodists, everyone, in fact, except the Come-Outers, and their regular meetings, being held in the open air or in the parlors of the members, were usually more or less in the nature of picnics, and lively ones, too. Sunday-school picnics were good fun; I admit it. But the attendance was limited, only the scholars and teachers of your own faith being invited, whereas to the annual picnic of the day-school came boys and girls you scarcely knew, or had merely heard of; youngsters who lived way "up to the west-'ard," in the vicinity of the abandoned salt works, or in "Bassett's Holler," by the fish-houses; or in "Woodchuck Lane," where the little one-story schoolhouse was half hidden by scrub oaks and huckleberry bushes and the teacher was paid twenty dollars a month—and

The School Picnic

earned it. Often there were as many as one hundred and sixty children at the day-school picnic; the biggest crowd you ever saw, till you grew older and visited the County Cattle Show at Ostable.

May was the month of the school picnic, and the selection of the date was another proof of the wisdom of the committee. May was one of the months when the average youngster in our village had almost to be driven to school. It was, of course, hard to study in January, when the "sliding down-hill" was in its prime; or in February, when skating on the schoolhouse pond was at its best, and you swallowed your lunch in four gulps, with your skates already strapped to your feet; or in early June, when the water was warm enough to go in "swimmin'"; yes, or in October, when the shagbarks were dropping in the woods; or in November, with Thanksgiving so near. But May—school in May was cruel!

You see it was in May that the weather grew warm enough for the windows to be opened. There was no fire built in the school-

Our Village

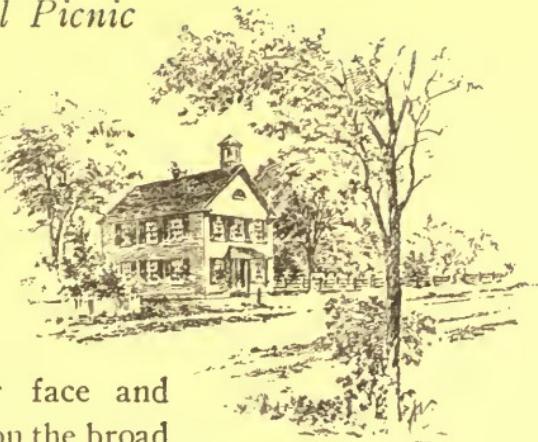
house stove. Some of the toughest boys—fortunate youngsters whose parents were poor or shiftless—began to go barefoot and to wiggle their toes in triumph at their shod and envious brethren. The scent of new grass and green things drifted in on the breeze. Birds sang in the orchard beyond the whitewashed fence. It was “nesting time,” and every male in our village, under the age of fifteen, had a cherished collection of eggs and was ambitious to add to it. Winter was over, spring was in its glory, and young blood stirred in answer to its call. No wonder that lessons limped and halted and discipline became more irksome than ever.

And then, on a forenoon when rebellion was most acute and even the good boys dreamed of “hooking jack” and going “egg-ing,” a dignified rap sounded on the schoolroom door. Teacher, hastening to answer it, admitted no less a personage than Captain Benijah Penniman, Chairman of the School Committee. And after a brief consultation she announced that Captain Penniman would address the school. The captain’s addresses

The School Picnic

were, ordinarily, pompous and dry enough; but now, as you squared your shoulders and put your hands behind you in the attitude of "attention," your face and those about you were on the broad grin. You knew what he was going to say. He was going to announce that the school picnic would be held in Bradley's Grove on such and such a day. Scholars were expected to bring their own lunches and meet in the school yard at half past eight. Lemonade and ice cream would be provided free. "Ahem! I—er—trust your behavior on that occasion will be becoming and such as to warrant the committee's—er—generosity for another year. Ahem!—er—yes."

Oh, that week—the week before the great event! Seven days? One hundred and sixty-eight hours? Humph! Well, maybe. But if every one of those hours was not a full year long, then you missed your guess. The



Our Village

copy in the writing book affirmed that "Time flies," and you are willing to admit, now that you and the old gentleman with the scythe are better acquainted, that there is some truth in the statement; but during the week preceding the school picnic you would have sworn that he stopped in the middle of the road and crawled under the car to tinker with the machinery. You spent the waking hours of that week with one eye on the clock and the other on the weather.

The weather used to mean so much in our village. When the First Baptist Society announced their strawberry festival—"strawberry vestibule," Sylvanus Cahoon persisted in calling it—the printed date on the bills was invariably followed by the line, "If stormy, first pleasant evening." And if it should storm on the day set for the picnic!

But it didn't. As you left the house, with your lunch basket on your arm, at a quarter to eight—you had been up since half past five and broad awake for an hour before that—the shadow of the big silver-leaf in the front yard lay clear cut, a deep-blue silhouette,

The School Picnic

across the yellow dust of the road. The blossoms from the cherry trees fluttered down in perfumed snow showers as the fresh spring breeze stirred the branches. The scent of lilacs mingled with the smell of doughnuts from the basket you were carrying. The waves in the bay were blue satin, with braided edges of silver.

You started alone, but before you reached the school yard you were one of a joyous party. "Snuppy" Rogers was waiting for you at his front gate between the box hedges. "Oaks" Foster whistled between his fingers and came tearing across the pasture lot. "Crocodile"—his dressed-up name was Sam Crocker—came hobbling, stone bruise and all, through the lane by Simons's. You passed a chirruping, beribboned party of little girls, who giggled and whispered about you behind their hands. You paid no attention to their whispers; you disdained girls—then.

The yard was crowded. The wagons were ready, the horses dozing by the poles. Improvised benches had been arranged in the wagons by laying planks from side to side.

Our Village

Some of the most calculating and forehanded children were already roosting in desirable places on the benches. Everybody had a lunch basket or box; everybody was talking or laughing at the top of his or her voice; everybody, even the two teachers—Mr. Bandmann, who taught “upstairs” in the grammar grades, and Miss Fairtree, who presided “downstairs” in the primary—were happy. Everybody was care free—that is, everybody except Zephaniah Hackett.

Zephaniah was not care free—well, hardly. Just suppose that you, besides being janitor of the schoolhouse and sexton of the Congregational church, were expected to provide ice cream—lemon and vanilla—for one hundred and fifty children, not to mention a dozen grown-ups; lemonade—*enough* lemonade—for the same crowd; had to attend to the loading of the freezers, the lemons, sugar, glasses, tubs, and dishes; had to see to all these things and be responsible for them; then suppose that yours was a nervous temperament, and that, being a bachelor, you had no children of your own, and consequently were not used to hav-

The School Picnic

ing them under your feet and crawling up your back and shouting questions in your ear ; wouldn't *you* be a trifle ruffled? I guess you would. During the years that have passed since your last school picnic you have learned to sympathize with Zephaniah.

Mr. Hackett's spare gray hair was tousled. His specs slid down his perspiring nose like boats on the water-chutes at Coney Island ; and as fast as he readjusted them, they were off on another coast. Tin spoons jingled out of his overflowing pockets as he rushed about. His vocal machinery needed oiling already.

"Hi!" he screamed hoarsely to his assistant, Mr. Gabe Lumley, who was to drive one of the wagons, "where's them washtubs goin'? In *your* wagon? Don't talk so foolish! Ain't the freezers in there? And the sassers and cups and all? Where you goin' to stow the folks? Cal'late you're runnin' a baggage truck, do ye? Yes, yes, yes, *yes*, YES! I'm a-comin', Mr. Bandmann. G'way from me, you little loons! Tramped on your foot! Well, get your feet out of the way! Ain't you got

Our Village

the whole yard to put 'em in without—oh, Julius Cæsar!"

No, you wouldn't have been Mr. Hackett for anything—except the ice cream and the lemonade.

The wagons fill; the benches are crowded by giggling, squealing rows. The last straggler comes tearing into the yard. Josiah Dimick's boy? Not much. It is only for regular school sessions that Natty Dimick is late; for picnics he is the first on the ground. Mr. Bandmann rises from his seat beside Mr. Lumley to take one last look. Zephaniah, perched on the tailboard, wipes an agonized forehead and opines that "Suthin's been forgot; I know it. Always have that feelin' and never knew it to fail to turn out so. Oh, *why* in time can't I get decent help! Expect one man to," etc.

The word is given. The wheels turn. We are off!

Bradley's Grove is away up by Great Pond, ever so far—twenty miles, or—or—well, four and a quarter, anyhow. The road, ruts six inches deep, winds through the pine groves

The School Picnic

and scrub oaks. From the bald spot at the top of Myrick's Hill you get your last view of the bay and the village. It is a pretty picture, that view, but you are too busy to notice it. Sam Eldredge, on the rear bench, has started a pinch going and it is your business to "pass it along."

A steep hill, Myrick's! The horses have to tug. What are we stopping for? Oh, nothing much! The tailboard has come unfastened and Mr. Hackett has been spilled into the dust. No harm done. Just his luck, he says, as he clammers aboard. "Might 'a' known that fool Gabe hadn't got gumption enough to hitch up a tailboard. 'Tain't his fault I ain't broke my everlastin' neck."

The little "Woodchuck Lane" schoolhouse has a "truck cart" full of youngsters, their teacher with them, waiting before it. The wagon falls in behind ours. At the next corner a riot is plainly in progress. No, not a riot;



Our Village

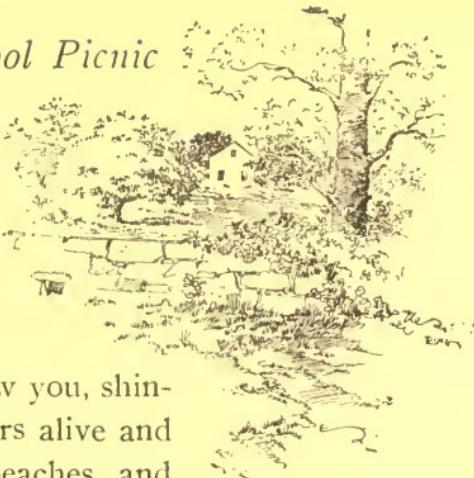
merely the wagons from "Bassett's Holler" and the school "up to the west'ard." The procession is a regular caravan by now, and the noise—whew! A tiny gray "cottontail" hops into the middle of the road, takes one look, and heads for tall timber. Wherever he is going he certainly will break the record for the distance.

More woods—and woods—and woods. Then a clearing, and a plowed field. Then a lone house, the house of Cyrus Bradley, owner of the grove. Fortunate man! He could have a picnic every day if he wanted to!

Cyrus is waiting by the rail fence, where we turn off to go to the pond. He has let down the bars already; a mean thing to do when there are seventy boys each eager to perform this important task. His luxuriant chin whiskers wave grandly in the breeze, "just like buckwheat," so "Snuppy" Rogers whispers. "Got a fine day for it, ain't ye?" comments Mr. Bradley. You bet you! Three cheers for the day! Three cheers for Cyrus! Three cheers for the buckwheat whisk—S-s-sh-h—behave yourselves!

The School Picnic

A narrow winding through the pines, their needles slapping you in the face as you duck under them. Then a sharp turn, and behold! below you, shining in the sun, its waters alive and dancing, its yellow beaches and sand bluffs decorative and color-giving, green, wooded hills hemming it in—Great Pond, with Bradley's Grove beside it.



Only a short ride now, but you don't ride. Like "Foolish Sol"—a local character who used to carry packages from one town to the other, running at full speed on the railroad tracks—you "can't stop for the train." You pile out of the wagon and race, one of a whooping multitude, down the hill and into the grove. The tall beeches reach out and cover you with their green-sleeved arms, the noble oaks and the birches, the latter spandy clean in new white bark, pillar the high dome of quivering foliage. On the pond and in the fields it is warm and brilliant; in the grove all is dusky coolness.

Our Village

The wagons enter one by one. The passengers—mostly teachers and the big boys and girls; all the younger set got out when you did—alight. Mr. Bandmann descends, calm and dignified. Zephaniah slips from the tail-board and becomes hysterically busy. The preliminaries are over. The picnic has begun.

There are so many things to do all at once—that is the main trouble. Mr. Hackett and Gabe Lumley are unloading the freezers and tubs and dishes, an extremely interesting process and one which you would like to watch. But “Snuppy” is on hand to suggest an excursion after yellowbirds’ eggs in the thickets by the shore of the pond; and “Oaks” Foster knows where there are likely to be some swamp apples—warty, watery excrescences, growing on low bushes, deliciously green and indigestible; and “Crocodile” thinks it would be fun to go off “by ourselves somewheres” and have a swim; and “Dodo” Salters has brought a fish line and proposes trying for “punkin’ seeds” and perch; and—“Aw, what are we standin’ round here for? Let’s do somethin’.”

The School Picnic

The thickets are green and tangled and delightful. No yellowbirds' nests in sight as yet, but always sure to be some just a little way farther on. The ground under foot is soggy and wet. Off come shoes and stockings. Now we can splash and wade and enjoy ourselves. Here's a swamp apple! Green? Certainly; but enough for one small bite apiece. Just as it comes your turn to bite, the worm inside sticks his head out. Never mind, you're first on the next one.

A sheltered little cove, its sandy beach hidden by bushes, and the water so clear that you can see the pebbles and fresh-water clams on the bottom of the very deepest hole. Sometimes, at home, at bedtime, it takes you almost a half hour to undress; now the slowest member of the gang is naked and neck deep in five minutes. Whee! but it's fine! You swim, dive, do the "dog paddle" and the "steamboat." Likewise you "sound," treading water and holding your nose, then sinking until one groping toe touches the sand, when you shoot to the surface, emerging with a sputter and a triumphant yell of "S-o-o deep!"

Our Village

When you get back to the grove, preparations for dinner are in full blast. Zephaniah, shirt sleeves rolled above his elbows, is making the lemonade. He has a big, two-handled squeezer and the yellow juice spatters in the bottom of the washtub. It makes your mouth pucker to watch him. The teachers and the big girls are spreading cloths on the ground in the largest clear space. Nonsense, of course! What's the use of tablecloths at a picnic? Why don't they have dinner now—now?

Well, they do at last. You gather about the cloths, kneeling or sitting "tailor fashion" on the moss and the leaves. Covers come off the lunch baskets. Ah, these mothers of ours! Who but a mother would spend hours of a busy day in preparing stuffed eggs and sandwiches and apple puffs and cake? Cake? There are no less than seventy-five different kinds of cake in those baskets and boxes, and every kind light, feathery, and delicious. You eat it all, all you can get, but you do not then appreciate the love and self-denial animating the tired hands which made

The School Picnic

it. Now you do, now when those hands have been at rest for so many years.

You've eaten all you can possibly stuff and have moistened the cargo with two tin cupfuls of lemonade. Therefore you are ready for the ice cream, which the ubiquitous Hackett is dealing out. His is certainly a bully job—none better—but, like all great men filling responsible positions, Zephaniah has his troubles.

"Hey? Well, wait a minute, can't ye?" he inquires, brandishing a saucer in one hand and an iron spoon in the other. "Hold on till it's your turn! I never see such a gang of young hogs in my born days. All right! *All right!* Which'll it be—lamon or vanilla? Lamon, you said? There you be! Clear off my feet! Mr. Bandmann, for the land sakes make a couple million of these young ones keep in line, can't ye?"

You had a great scheme, product of "Crocodile's" inventive brain, by which you were to obtain both kinds of ice cream. You were to get the lemon first, swallow it as quick as possible, hide your saucer and spoon in the

Our Village

bushes and then line up once more, innocent and bland, to be helped to vanilla; the supposition being that Mr. Hackett, in the rush of his occupation, would not remember and would think it was your first trip. It was a good plan and might have worked—if it had not been for teacher.

However, you get enough—quite enough. You were there to eat and you have fulfilled your destiny. Trifles, such as crawling caterpillars and investigating bugs, may annoy finicky and foolish folks like women and girls—may even prevent their enjoyment of ice cream and lemonade—but a boy's appetite is bug proof. If an insect is swallowed, so much the worse for it, that's all.

After dinner is a more or less restful time. You have no craving for that widely advertised panacea which will do away with "that full feeling after eating." To feel full is to be full, and to be full is the proper and blissful state following a picnic meal. You loll about and talk and laugh. The smaller girls made wreaths of oak and holly leaves, ridiculous contraptions with which they would dec-

The School Picnic

orate you if you would let them. But you're no sissy, like Gussie Ellis, the Sunday-school superintendent's boy. His hair is curly and he likes—actually *likes*—to play with girls. Think of it!

But Gussie is not the only boy at that picnic who likes girls, evidently not. The big fellows of sixteen or seventeen—those in the back seats of Mr. Bandmann's "upstairs" school-room—are talking or walking about with the damsels in muslin and ribbons, girls old enough, almost, to put their hair up, and whose dresses reach their shoe tops. Couple after couple stroll away along the beach of the pond or under the oaks. Softies! Wouldn't it make you sick!

Ah, well! there *were* picnics, picnics of a later time, when you, too, strolled under the trees with a being radiant in ruffles and ribbons. And you enjoyed it, too, even though you were bashfully conscious of not knowing what to say, and painfully aware that your new shoes were a size too small. There was one girl in particular whose eyes were as black and deep as the water in the well at home and

Our Village

with the same liquid sparkle in them. She was slender and moved with the grace of a blown dandelion puff. Her hair was brown and tied with a blue ribbon. You stole that ribbon and refused to give it back, in spite of her not too strenuous protests. You said you were going to keep it always. Goodness



knows where it is now. And when you met her during "Old Home Week" last summer, she looked as if she might weigh two hundred pounds, and she said she wouldn't have known you because you had grown so bald.

On the little knoll overlooking the pond, the grown folks—the teachers and Mr. Hackett and Gabe—are talking lazily. Zephaniah is

The School Picnic

telling of other picnics in that grove, when he was a boy, and later. He tells one story which is a local tradition; you have heard your mother tell it. How, in the old times when our village was the home of seafaring men, retired or active, a gay party came to Great Pond on a picnic. And a young sea captain and his bride, a lovely girl, were there. They, with some others, went out sailing on the pond, the boat was upset by a sudden squall, and her laughing, happy passengers were thrown into the water. All were saved but one, the beautiful young bride. She, it is supposed, was pinned down by the sail, and sank. "And," says Zephaniah, "when they got her out she was drownded dead. And I'll never get the sight of her husband's face off my mind—never!"

It was a sad story, and sadder than ever now, as the sun sinks and the shadows of the hills beyond are thrown duskily on the water. It makes you shiver—although possibly the swamp apples and sweet flag and lemonade and ice cream with which you are freighted are contributing toward your inward uneasi-

Our Village

ness. At any rate you do not complain when the order is given to harness the horses for the homeward ride.

The wagons move out of the grove. The twilight deepens. Fireflies twinkle and dance, like drifting sparks blown from dying fires, amidst the thickets where you hoped to find the birds' nests. You wouldn't go there now for *anything*. The frogs begin their evening serenade of warning, the little "pinkwinks" furnishing the shrill soprano and the great bull-throated chaps along the pond's edges booming the bass.

Deep—deep ! deep—deep ! deep—deep !
Better go 'round! Better go 'round!

The stars are lighted up one by one. A mist rises all about. The thought of the cozy sitting room at home comes to your mind and is attractive.

The woods are blots of blackness framing the narrow ribbon of road. The breeze has a damp, sweet, night odor. In the leading wagon some one begins to sing "Seeing Nellie Home," and the plaintive melody is taken up

The School Picnic

along the line. Then follows "The Spanish Cavalier" and "Tavern in the Town," and, of course and always, "Home Again from a Foreign Shore."

Our house, the back part of it, is alight and inviting. You shout your good nights and tumble out of the wagon. The side door, the door under the lattice of wistaria and morning-glory vines, swings wide and on its threshold stands some one who kisses you and asks: "Well, did you have a good time, dearie?"

Oh, me! if just once more you might alight at that door and be welcomed by that some one. Would your answer then, even though you were ever so tired and sleepy, be careless or cross? No! no, indeed! But that door is shut, forever and ever shut.

The last you hear from the wagons as they rattle along the main road is Zephaniah Hackett's wail from his perch on the last tailboard of all.

"By thunder mighty! I'm clean wore and petered out. I wisht to the everlastin' there wan't no such things as school picnics."

Zephaniah would have his wish if he were

Our Village

living now. There are no more day-school picnics in our village. There are picnics, of course, there and all over this big country; your own boy is going to one next week and is exultant.

"We're going to the big park, pa," he crows. "And there are merry-go-rounds and all sorts of fun. We are going in special trolley cars. Hurrah!"

He doesn't know any better; he hasn't had your advantages. So you smother your pity and try to enthuse with him. But to picnic in a park, after riding in a trolley! Mercy on us! what is the world coming to?



OUR OLDEST INHABITANT





OUR OLDEST INHABITANT

WHEN you were a small boy in our village and "Snuppy" Rogers was your chum, it happened that Snuppy's father went away out West, to a place called Chicago, on a visit. His going created a sensation and developed arrogance and boastfulness in his son and heir. It is true that the men folks in our village—the majority of them—were constantly going to and arriving from places much farther off than Chicago, places like Surinam and Calcutta and Mauritius and Hongkong, but this was because they were sea captains and travel is a necessary bother pertaining to that profession. To go to Chicago by rail,

Our Village

and purely for pleasure, was different, vastly different. Besides, Snuppy's father was not a sea captain, being merely a wheelwright and carriage painter, and was therefore neither aristocratic nor "well off." "How those Rogerses can afford it," was the prevailing topic at sewing circle.

How they could afford it you may not attempt to answer even at this late day, when the person claiming to be Snuppy is portly and bald and prosperous, with seven or eight boys and girls of his own. But you distinctly remember that when Rogers, Senior, returned to our village he brought with him, among other things, several copies of a then new comic weekly, and in one of these copies was an intensely humorous article concerning an individual called "The Oldest Inhabitant."

The "oldest inhabitant" was represented in the article and pictures as a red-nosed veteran with sunken lips and a fringe of throat whisker, who wore a tippet and a frowzy cap with earlaps, and sat with cowhide boots braced against the stove at the "store," where he reeled off marvelous yarns concerning the

Our Oldest Inhabitant

hard winter of '38 and the days when he could "lick ary two men in the county and think nawthin' of it." "They don't raise them kind of boys nowadays," he proclaimed in querulous challenge. Then he borrowed a "chaw," helped himself to crackers and cheese at the storekeeper's expense, and went on to deliver a prevarication that filled a column and a quarter, exclusive of cuts.

The other loungers—in that comic-weekly store—winked at each other behind his back and egged him on to other and loftier flights of romance. A young man named Ezra Hayseed, who appeared to be a dreadful cut-up, sewed his coat tails together behind his chair. A kindred spirit put a bunch of firecrackers beneath it. The oldest inhabitant's story concluded with a burst of fireworks and language, and the article ended as the other loafers were congratulating Mr. Hayseed and his friend upon the success of their joke. As for the oldest inhabitant, he departed, minus the lower half of his coat, presumably to return to the asylum for feeble-minded from which he had escaped.

Our Village

You and Snuppy enjoyed the article. Its humor was of the knockdown variety and understandable, not like the things He said and She replied to in that same periodical. You wished there was an oldest inhabitant of that kind in our village, so that you or—this would be safer—some of the big boys who sat in the back seats at school might sew and blow him up.

But when you came to talk it over you ran into a snag.

"Oldest inhabitant," said Snuppy. "Oldest inhabitant? Why, that must mean the oldest man in town, like—like Deacon Pepper. Seems to me I heard pa call him that once. Cracky! Nobody'd dast to blow *him* up."

You should say not. Deacon Pepper, tall and whitebearded and bespectacled, who wore a high hat and carried a gold-headed cane, who was a pillar of the Baptist church! As soon think of playing tricks on St. Peter. And yet, as you learned by inquiry, Deacon Pepper was our oldest inhabitant.

You spoke to Uncle Seth about it. Uncle Seth was fifty-five or so, but you never would

Our Oldest Inhabitant

have guessed it; he was so jolly and lively and full of fun.

"Yes," said Uncle Seth, "Deacon Pepper is our oldest inhabitant now. He's nearly ninety. Before him it was Parson Simpkins. I remember—"

Uncle Seth's remembrances of Parson Simpkins were many and various. He remembered the Sundays of long ago—the old-fashioned Puritanical Sunday or "Sabba' Day," as grandma used to call it. The Sabbath that began on sunset of a Saturday and ended, so far as its strict observance was concerned, at dusk on the day following. Before the little meetin' house on the hill had been modernized and fixed over. When its high pews had doors to them, and the minister went up a winding stair to reach the pulpit. When a sermon was expected to last an hour and a half or the congregation thought it was not getting its money's worth. When there wasn't any Sunday-school. When a fiddle and a bass viol furnished the instrumental music and Elder Ryder led the singing, beating time with his tuning fork.

Our Village

He remembered when Cap'n Sam Berry, who made his money swapping glass beads and empty bottles for copra and pearls over in the South Seas, presented the church with the new organ. He remembered the row that ensued, a division that came near to splitting the society in twain. How Deacon Issachar Snow "riz right up" in his pew to denounce the innovation.

"Ain't it enough," demanded Issachar, "to have fiddles and such squealin' in the sanctuary without drowndin' the hymn tunes with the devil's pitch pipes? Do you s'pose the Almighty likes to hear such bull's bellerin'? Organ! Might as well have a pianner and play dance music!"

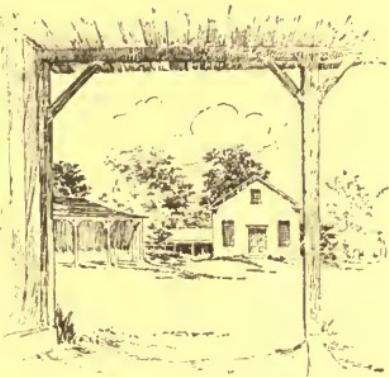
But the organ came, and years afterwards, when you went to church, Deacon Issachar's granddaughter played it.

Uncle Seth liked to tell of the old Sabbaths. How the meeting house was crowded and the sheds were filled with "teams," and carryalls and chaises stood all about the churchyard. How Nathaniel Baker's family—nine children, eight of them boys—used to trudge

Our Oldest Inhabitant

barefoot all the way from the west end of the town, three good miles, carrying their shoes and stockings in their hands, and then put them on before going into meeting. They always took them off again when they came out, for Nathaniel was a poor man and shoe leather cost money.

It was a solemn occasion when Parson Simpkins came to a house for a pastoral call. There were prayers, of course, and reading from the Scriptures, but, before these, "refreshments" were served—fruit cake and several other kinds of cake, and invariably for the "grown-ups" a dram of New England rum from the decanter in the parlor closet. "The parson's closet," they used to call it then. To you this part of Uncle Seth's story was the most fascinating of all, because it sounded so wicked. Since Parson Simpkins's day total abstinence had become the rule in our village. Only the no-accounts, like the



Our Village

proprietor of the billiard, pool, and sipo parlors and his regular customers, ever drank liquor. They usually "had a jug come down" before the Fourth and at Christmas, and the selectmen were busy and the town lock-up occupied for the week following.

You listened to Uncle Seth's yarns with interest, but your mind was busy with a perplexing problem. There was something you didn't understand.

"Uncle Seth," you interrupted, "Mr. Zach Taylor, down to the Neck, is older'n Deacon Pepper, ain't he? Why ain't he the oldest inhabitant?"

"Humph!" grunted Uncle Seth. "Yes, I cal'late Zach is a year or two older; but nobody thinks of calling him the 'oldest inhabitant.' I don't know exactly why, nuther, but they don't."

That was true, they didn't. "Old Zach" was a character in his way, but he was always Old Zach, nothing more. Our village liked to talk about Old Zach, liked to tell stories about him—how, when the wife with whom he had lived and fought for fifty odd years

Our Oldest Inhabitant

died, and he was too poor to give her fitting burial, some of the kind-hearted townspeople raised a purse, bought a handsome coffin, and decorated the tumble-down shanty with flowers. Next day they called to cheer the bereaved one in his solitude. They found him striding up and down before the door, his face lit up with pride.

"I tell ye," cried Old Zach, seizing the hand of a sympathizer, "that was a d—n good funeral, and I'll bet the old woman is tellin' 'em so up aloft."

No, Old Zach's was not the head to inherit the crown of "oldest inhabitant." And "Old Howes," though he lived to be nearly one hundred, never wore it. When Old Howes was eighty he could stand in one cranberry barrel and jump from it into another—was willing to do it, too, provided the reward, in the shape of a drink or a chew, was forthcoming. He wore white whiskers, stained a vivid yellow about the mouth, and had been to sea in a ship so big you could "heave a dog through the hawse holes."

"Did you ever do it, Mr. Howes?" asked

Our Village

one interested juvenile who had listened to this statement.

“Do? Do ‘what?’”

“Why—why, heave the dog through?”

“What in time would I be doin’ that for?
S’pose a man don’t have nawthin’ to do
aboard ship but chuck dogs around?”

“But you said——”

“Hush up, or I’ll heave *you* out the window!”

Nobody ever spoke of Old Howes as the oldest inhabitant. Nor of “Old Higgins” either, for that matter. In fact, the latter celebrity was most commonly nicknamed “Old Beauregard,” for reasons unexplained, and he drove a more or less white ox in a more or less green chaise. It was “Old Beauregard” who entered the shop of a local merchant—a newcomer in our village and unacquainted with its characters—and asked for a plug of tobacco. Receiving it, he turned and started for the door.

“But—but,” stammered the storekeeper,
“haven’t you forgotten to leave the money?”

“Money!” snorted Old Beauregard, with



“‘Don’t talk to me about money *these* hard times!’”

Our Oldest Inhabitant

withering scorn. "Don't talk to me about money *these* hard times!"

Then he departed with the tobacco.

It was Old Beauregard also who made anxious inquiries of this same storekeeper, asserting that he wanted to find "a good, responsible man to borer ten dollars of." He died at the age of ninety-four, proudly boasting that no person in the country owed more than he did. But he was never the oldest inhabitant.

And to no woman was the title given. This includes Aunt Hannah Cahoon, who lived to be one hundred and three, who smoked a pipe, and believed in signs and omens—openly proclaimed her belief to the minister, at that—and whose gravestone in the no'theast corner of the Methodist burying ground is still pointed out to strangers. Uncle Seth could remember Aunt Hannah when she was younger. Could remember her sister, who was a "Jumping Come-Outer," a sect whose religious fervor manifested itself in sudden and unexpected seizures, during which the ecstatic devotee leaped and shrieked and pranced.

Once when Abitha, this was the sister's

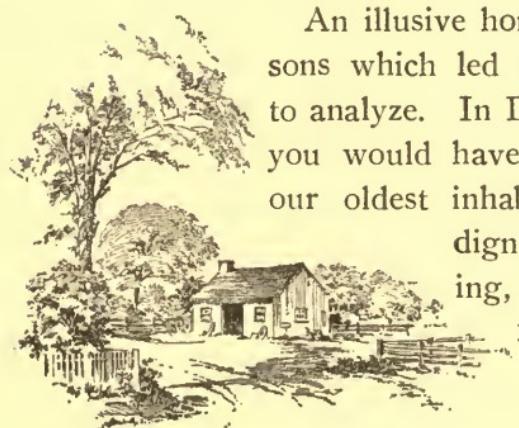
Our Village

name, had, in the midst of a Saturday's baking, been "seized" and was performing in the front yard, to the scandal or amusement of the neighbors, Hannah calmly emerged from the kitchen door, carrying a bucket. She went to the well, drew the bucket full of icy water, and then poured its contents over her "Come-Outer" sister.

"There's a time for all things, Abbie," she observed, "even for religion; and Saturday mornin' is bakin' time. If that don't make you remember that them pies of yours are burnin', I'll go fetch another bucket."

Aunt Hannah was locally famous for this and for many other eccentricities, but while she was yet alive, and her tongue the terror of the neighborhood, Cap'n Abel Doane, a mere infant of eighty-six, was our oldest inhabitant.

An illusive honor this, and the reasons which led to its bestowal hard to analyze. In Deacon Pepper's case, you would have decided that, to be our oldest inhabitant, one must be dignified and church-going, a member of the



Our Oldest Inhabitant

majority party in politics, and, probably, a selectman.

But Cap'n Doane, though dignified enough—to hear him blow his nose as he marched up the street was a warning for low people and underlings to clear the way—was distinctly not church-going, and in politics was always on the opposite side of the fence. During the war he was the local “copper-head,” and was more than once “shivareed” by the patriotic loafers and small boys. He couldn’t have been elected selectman, and he knew it; therefore he was a perennial candidate. He opposed all popular measures in town meeting and championed all unpopular ones. He was most cordially hated, but was universally respected, and lived his lonely life out in his own gruff, hard way. And when he died, his funeral was attended by nearly every person in the village, and there were some present who wondered where, now that he was gone, their winter fuel was to come from or the money necessary for their children’s shoes and clothes. He had thrown his charity at them, as he might have thrown a

Our Village

bone at a stray dog, but no one but themselves and he knew that it was thrown.

Now, as you look back at our village's choice of its oldest inhabitant, it seems to you that Cap'n Eben Bailey graced the position best of all. He is the ideal by which you measure all the others. And yet Cap'n Eben was not dignified and "churchy" like Deacon Pepper, nor rich and arrogant like Cap'n Doane. Cap'n Eben wasn't even a sea captain—though he had been one—but only a store-keeper, and not a very prosperous store-keeper, at that. People didn't take their hats off to him, as they did to the deacon, and they didn't fear him, as they did Cap'n Abel. But among all your memories of our village there isn't one of an ill-natured, unkind word spoken by rich or poor concerning Cap'n Eben Bailey.

Time had been when Cap'n Eben was declared to be "one of the smartest, likeliest young shipmasters that ever trod a deck." He went to sea, as cabin boy, when he was thirteen. At nineteen he was first mate of an Australian clipper. At twenty-two he commanded that same clipper. He took as pas-

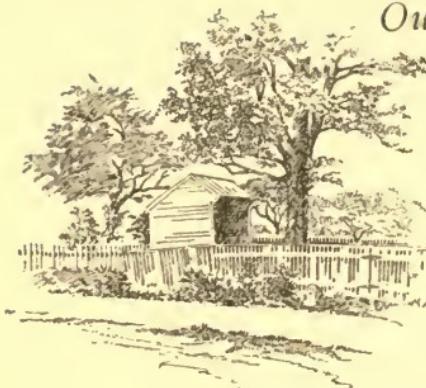
Our Oldest Inhabitant

senger the first American consul from the United States to Melbourne. He and the consul became great friends during the voyage, and the friendship lasted until the latter's death. This consul liked Australia so well that he decided to make it his home, and he and Cap'n Eben corresponded for many years.

When he was thirty-five Cap'n Eben married one of the prettiest girls in our village; years younger than he, she was, but everyone said how lucky Susannah Coffin was to get such a fine husband. Susannah's people made a great wedding for her—a church wedding—something unusual in those days—and then she and the captain left our village on the packet for Boston, where they were to go aboard Cap'n Eben's ship and set sail on a honeymoon voyage to Batavia and Samarang and Singapore, and goodness knows how many other queer-sounding and outlandish places. A number of friends of the bridal couple went with them to Boston to say good-by.

There were no cables in those old times, which so many call "good" without mean-

Our Village



ing it, and months and months passed during which our village went about its business and only remembered Cap'n Eben and his bride occasionally. But at last came letters to the Coffins

and the Baileys, letters from Batavia. The ship had reached that port safely, the voyage had been pleasant, both were well and would write again from Singapore.

Then for a long time nothing was heard, and when, after the anxious waiting, news did come, it was sad enough. Somewhere in the Java Sea the ship had been struck by a typhoon. She emerged from the vortex of this storm, battered, dismasted, and sinking: The officers and crew took to the boats, but the waves were still high and the wind and rain not yet over. It was night and very dark and the boats became separated. In Cap'n Eben's boat, with him, were his wife and four seamen.

Some time during that night, and without

Our Oldest Inhabitant

warning, a giant wave caught the boat under the stern and pitch-poled her, end over end. She floated, bottom up, but of those who had been in her only two came to the surface and seized her keel. Cap'n Eben and a young sailor. The others had been thrown far from the boat and had gone down at once.

In the letters, written by kind-hearted English-speaking people at Singapore, which told all this, were also written fragments of the story of that night and the next day as narrated by Cap'n Eben's companion, the sailor. The frantic skipper, thinking that perhaps his wife might have risen beneath the overturned boat, dived repeatedly. He was nearly exhausted when morning dawned over a rolling, oily sea and with a fiery sun beating down upon the heads of the two men.

At three o'clock that afternoon they were picked up by a Dutch trading bark bound up the Madagascar Straits. The sailor was in fairly good condition, considering what he had endured, but Cap'n Eben was suffering from partial sunstroke and was raving. Now, the letter said, he was being cared for at

Our Village

Singapore and was gaining in strength, but his mind seemed to be gone. He remembered little and was like a child.

And like a child he was brought home a year later by a brother of his dead wife, whom the families had sent on for the purpose. His brown hair had broad gray streaks in it, and he would sit for hours on the porch before his home, gazing dreamily at the elm trees across the road and speaking to no one.

Little by little his faculties returned, but he never was the energetic man he had been and he never went to sea again. He was always glad to see callers, but he never mentioned his dead wife or the shipwreck. That portion of his life had been, apparently, wiped from his memory.

It was at this period that he began reading the Bible; reading it and accepting and interpreting its every line with a literal earnestness which was odd, to say the least. When his sister died he mourned for her in sackcloth and ashes, as David mourned for Absalom. They found him dressed in old gunny bags, seated on the family ash heap, and though this

Our Oldest Inhabitant

would have been funny enough in anyone else, no one laughed at Cap'n Eben.

Long afterwards, when you knew him, he was bent and white-haired and very deaf. But his kind old face was as calm and sweetly



placid as that of a saint. Of his eccentricities but one remained: he believed that he should live forever on this earth.

“If ye believe in Me,” had said the Man of Galilee, “ye shall never die.” And surely Cap'n Eben believed in Him. No one, not even the minister, who was suspected of “ad-

Our Village

vanced ideas," ever attempted to argue the cap'n out of his conviction of a material immortality. It couldn't have been done, in the first place, and, if it could, who had the heart to shatter such a beautiful dream?

The sights and smells of Cap'n Eben's stuffy little store linger with you yet. The calico and dress goods were piled beside the cigar and tobacco show case. There were jars of striped stick candy and pink and red peppermint on the shelf above the tea chest. The splint-work photograph frames, made by the captain's grandniece three years before to tempt possible buyers of Christmas gifts, and never sold, were displayed artistically by the box of prunes. In winter a big stove was planted in the middle of the room, and when you entered, mentally running over the items of your errand—"Half a pound of tea, a yard of black tape, a quart of yellow-eyed beans, and fifty cents' worth of brown sugar"—you were likely to find that stove surrounded by a circle of ancient mariners who had known Cap'n Eben in his prime and had not forgotten him in his age.

Our Oldest Inhabitant

O for an all-embracing memory which could have held and retained the yarns told about that stove, yarns of adventure afloat and ashore in places that are merely dots and names upon the map of the world! Here was "material" for you, at first hand, and told with a nautical twist which brings the salt taste to your mouth even now. But the yarns are gone and the old skippers who spun them have gone, too, on the longest voyage of all—the voyage we shall all take, and for which our passages were booked the day we were born.

And Cap'n Eben, despite his firm belief and the plain statement of the Good Book, set sail upon that voyage twenty years ago. There must have been an error in his logic somewhere, but at least he never knew it. "I feel sort of tired, Huldy," he said to his grand-niece one evening. "I guess I'll go aloft and turn in." And when, at breakfast time next morning, the girl went up to call him, she found that she was too late—the call had come during the night, and he had answered "Aye, aye!" as a seaman should.

Our Village

Last summer, when you were talking with the portly person who so brazenly claimed to be the Snuppy Rogers you used to chum with, the subject of "our oldest inhabitant" drifted into the conversation.

"Hum!" you said reflectively. "I wonder who *is* oldest inhabitant now?"

"Why," replied Snuppy, "I don't know. Let me see. I guess—I guess it's Mr. Seth Crosby. Yes, I remember that they do call him oldest inhabitant now."

Mr. Seth Crosby! *Uncle Seth!* The oldest inhabitant! Nonsense! And yet as you hurriedly do a sum in mental arithmetic, the answer is uncontrovertible. Uncle Seth is eighty-eight.

But Uncle Seth the oldest inhabitant? Why, it doesn't seem possible. Then you remember that you yourself are nearly f—
Ss—sh! Let's talk about something else.

TEACHER



TEACHER

THE schoolhouse in our village was on the main road, directly opposite Cap'n Daniels's store. In your younger days you accepted its location as a proof of wisdom on the part of the selectmen or the school committee, or whoever was responsible for placing it there. In Cap'n Daniels's store, and nowhere else in town, could be bought two "jaw breakers" for a penny, big "jaw breakers" at that, round, flavored with peppermint, and harder than the rock of Gibraltar. One of these grapeshot, scientifically inserted in the left cheek, gave to a youngster the appearance of a severe case of one-sided mumps and the joy

Our Village

of two hours' slowly dissolving sweetness. These were the chief charms of "jaw breakers," they were cheap and they "lasted long."

In that store, also, one might purchase—always provided that the financial consideration was forthcoming—a peculiar kind of molasses stick candy, thickly coated with chocolate. When one of the "gang" happened to be in funds to the extent of, perhaps, two cents—earned by the going of errands, by the selling of bones and old iron to the junk man, or obtained by diplomatic appeal to the generosity of a relative—the procession of the elect formed in the school yard and marched majestically across the road, through the battered doorway and up to the cap'n's little show case, where, beneath the cracked panes mended with strips of brown paper and mucilage, were displayed delectable dainties in various stages of age and gumminess. The moneyed individual of the party produced his two-cent piece; rapped peremptorily on a particular pane and shrieked—for Cap'n Daniels was extremely "deef"—"Gimme two o' them, please; them there." Then, having pro-

Teacher

cured the chocolate-covered chunks, it remained only to distribute them in "bites," the size of each bite being limited by the pressure of the owner's thumb nail on the stick. To bite close up to the thumb nail was fair and aboveboard; to attempt a "hog bite" was considered ill mannered.

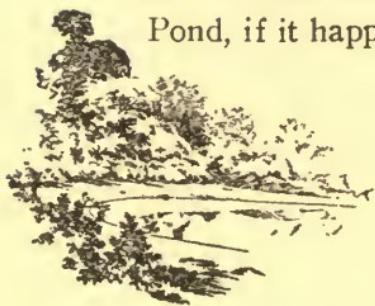
Besides candy, Cap'n Daniels sold slates and pencils and penholders and sponges and "T. D." pipes—fine for hayseed and sweet fern—and elastic for slingshots and marbles, and goodness knows how many other necessities of boy life. Therefore it was a graceful though rather obvious act of kindness to build the schoolhouse directly opposite such a depot of supplies. Then, too, wasn't the Schoolhouse Pond only a hundred yards away? Where could you have skated during recess and noon hour if they hadn't put the schoolhouse where it was?

That pond was a luxury. A few months ago a friend of yours, who is principal of a big city school (another evidence of the depravity in taste brought about by the years; there was a time when you would have

Our Village

scorned to own a teacher as your friend), showed you through the mammoth new building over which he presided. He was proud of that building. It had forty rooms or so, each bigger than either "upstairs" or "downstairs" in the school at our village, and there was an assembly room, and a big gymnasium, and a room in which the scholars who lived some distance off, and in stormy weather brought their lunches, might eat them. Then they could play in the gymnasium if they wanted to.

The principal boasted loudly of the gymnasium and the lunch room, but you didn't think much of them. You used to carry your lunch—or your dinner; nobody in our village called the noon meal "lunch"—but you didn't need any particular room to eat it in. No, sir! you ate your boiled eggs and pie and doughnuts and cookies at the edge of the Schoolhouse Pond, if it happened to be winter and no snow on the ground, and it took you maybe ten minutes to cram the whole meal into your system. Then, as your



Teacher

skates were already on, you tossed the tin pail up on the bank and shot out upon the ice, to glide and "scull" and do the "outer edge" and the "roll," until the bell warned you that the time had come to return to common fractions and the boundaries of the Territory of New Mexico.

So when your friend boasted of his mammoth building and its gymnasium, you smiled in a superior fashion and thought: "This is all right, so far as it goes, perhaps, but where is your Schoolhouse Pond?"

There were "grades" innumerable at this city school. In our village the school was not divided into grades, but into halves. The lower half—that where the little chaps learned their little "C-A-T—Cat," and so on up to "Meg's Race for Life," in the Fourth Reader —was called; by reason of its location, "downstairs." The upper half—where your education progressed until you were able to declare with certainty that "All Gaul is divided into three parts," and recite without looking at the book, "It had been a day of triumph at the capital. Somebody or other,

Our Village

returning with victorious eagles, had amused the populace," etc.—that half was, of course, "upstairs." High school there was none. Students completing the upstairs courses and graduating on "last day" usually went to work. Those who yearned—or whose parents yearned—for higher education might attend the "academy" at Edgewater.

Teachers at our school were, like the divisions, two in number. A female taught downstairs; a male upstairs. The downstairs teacher was, generally speaking, a native of our village; the upstairs candidates came usually from beyond township limits. They, the upstairs teachers, were pretty likely to be young fellows just out of college, who intended practicing law or medicine some day, and, by teaching, were trying to earn and save money enough to begin their professional studies. When one had accomplished this feat—or thought he had—he departed and a new one took his place.

One reason why the position of teacher upstairs was so seldom accepted as permanent by the men who filled it was the salary. And

Teacher

yet this salary was considered princely by many of the voters in our village. It was more than the majority of the stay-at-homes were able to make, and it was paid each month in good hard cash. As for you and the rest of the scholars, you regarded it with awe and envy. In fact, the salary was rated much higher than the pedagogue's intellectual qualities; witness the quatrain enthusiastically chanted by boys well out of hearing of the schoolhouse:

“Oh, Power above, send down your love
Upon us all, poor scholars,
With a great big fool to teach our school,
And they pay him sixty dollars.”

That is, sixty dollars a month during the teaching season. And, after all, when you consider that “teacher” might lodge at the Widow Cummings’s, in a room overlooking the bay, said room being furnished with a corded bedstead and a feather bed smothered under a “log-cabin” quilt, a “diamond” quilt, a “rising-sun” quilt, and other quilts and comforters; with a crayon enlargement of

Our Village

Grandpa Cummings and a spatter-work motto on the wall; with a blue-flowered wash bowl and pitcher on a pink-flowered "commode"; when you consider that he was privileged to enjoy the cultured conversation of Miss Beasley and the rest at the table, and that all these luxuries were his for three dollars paid the widow each Saturday night—then a wage of fifteen dollars weekly doesn't seem so bad. No wonder he could save money; particularly as "jaw breakers" and Cap'n Daniels's store seemed to tempt him not in the least.

When grandma went to school—an experience to which the old lady never failed in reference whenever you chanced to complain of your own educational trials—she didn't have "no fine place, all fixed up pretty so's it ought to be a delight to study your lesson book in it." No, indeed! She attended the old "dees-trict school," and the old "deestrict-school" building, a tumble-down ruin in your day, still stood on the lane leading to the railroad station. Having climbed in at the sashless, paneless windows several times, you have a fair

Teacher

idea of what the district school of grandma's youth must have looked like.

It was small, very small, and perfectly square. The floor sloped on three sides down to the platform where the teacher's desk used to be.

The big boys and girls sat in the back seats—just as they did in your school, for that matter—and the little ones in front. There were long benches instead of individual chairs. And, by the way, the exterior of the building was a dingy brown. The "little red schoolhouse" we hear so much about may have existed somewhere, but apparently not in our village.

"Perfessor" Dingley taught the deestrict school when grandma was a girl. No medical student was the "professor." School-teaching was his trade, and its practice included much physical as well as mental labor. To undertake the guidance of a youth old enough and big enough to "go a-fishin'" on Banks voyages during the summer months and attain an education in the winter time



Our Village

must have required a good deal of main strength along with the will power.

Professor Dingley's hobby was mathematics. He loved to wrestle with abstruse problems, and figures were his playthings. Often and often, according to grandma, he would become so wrapped in an arithmetical puzzle as to forget the school entirely. While he sat at his desk, his head on his hands, the scholars would raise Cain, whispering, throwing spit-balls, and "carrying on" generally. In the midst of the chaos old Dingley would come out of his trance. His eye would light upon some one of the most energetic performers. Then, without warning and directly at the offender's head, would be hurled the arithmetic book, the heavy ebony ferule, or whatever happened to be nearest the irate teacher's arm. And for the next five minutes the professor would rage up and down the aisles, smiting right and left, and leaving bumps, tears, and studious attention in his wake. The attainment of knowledge at the destrict school must have been a splendid preparation for the stern battles of life.

Teacher

It was at the old school, while grandma was in the lower classes, that Laban Gore made his undying reputation as a public speaker. Friday, of course, was " speakin' pieces day," and Laban had struggled to commit to memory a flowery oration delivered by some great man upon the occasion of the presentation of a flag to a company enlisted for the War of 1812. Master Gore's name being called, he arose and shuffled to the platform. Bowing, he turned a blanched but freckled face to the expectant audience.

" 'Take the banner—'" began Laban; "barner" was the way he pronounced the word, and it was accompanied by a rigid, right-angle thrust of a clenched fist.

" 'Take the barner—'" repeated Laban, shooting out the fist once more. "Er—er—
' Take the barner—'"

He paused and gulped feverishly.

" Well, sir? " observed old Dingley.

" Er—er— 'Take the barner—' Er—er—
er— 'Take the barner—'" Another pause,
more gulps, another gesture, and " Er—er—
' Take the barner—'"

Our Village

"We-l-l?" drawled the professor, his voice rising.

"Take the barner—" shrieked poor Laban. "Take the barner—Take the—the—the barner—"

"Take your *seat!*!" roared Dingley. "Remain after school and I'll try and find something else for you to 'take.' "

Laban's declamation was probably the most successful ever delivered in our village, if the enjoyment of his hearers and the unforgetableness of his remarks are taken into consideration. Everybody called him "Barner Gore" after that.

On this same Friday James Collins—your great-uncle Jim—recited the poem beginning, "Oh, sailor boy, sailor boy!" so beautifully that tears came to the stern gray eyes of old Dingley, and the little girls down in front wept. It was a poem of shipwreck, and the poor sailor boy, its hero, was drowned.

Afterwards, when Uncle Jim, only twenty years of age, and first mate at that, went down with his ship off Cape Hatteras, people said the poem was a prophecy. But poor Laban

Teacher

Gore, bos'n on that same ship, was drowned, too, and no one spoke of the "barner" oration as a prophecy or implying a presentiment.

During your three years of scholastic labor downstairs, Miss Serena Fairtree was teacher of that division. She was sweet and kind and long-suffering, and her most severe punishment was to shut the offender up in the dark closet where the stove wood was kept. On that very "last day," when you said farewell to the primary books and other infantile puerilities, Miss Serena said farewell also. She had accepted a better position over in Ostable, where she taught for one term and then married the chairman of the Ostable school committee. Miss Olivia Simpson was her successor downstairs. You, as a full-fledged upstairs freshman, with all the privilege of that exalted station—including the right to leave the yard at recess without asking permission and to go all around the schoolhouse instead of being



Our Village

confined to the "boys' side"—you grinned sarcastically at Miss Olivia's odd garb and stern masculine demeanor. You congratulated yourself that "that old maid" wouldn't have the chance to boss *you*. This premature crow of triumph would seem to prove that Uncle Jim's gift of prophecy was not hereditary in the family.

"Specs" Bandmann was your first upstairs teacher. "Specs" wore eyeglasses—hence his name—and was so dignified and pompous that he bent backward when he walked. His principal accomplishment was the ease with which he could lift a boy out of a seat over a desk and into the aisle with one "yank" of his good right arm. He treated big, lubberly Obed Ginn—whose inexplicable nickname was "Sumach Bitters"; "Bitters," for short—that way once, and "Bitters" behaved himself thereafter during "Specs'" term. But "Specs" resigned in the spring to enter the Harvard Medical College, and, when school opened in the fall, Mr. Lyon was the new teacher.

If ever a man belied his name—as it was

Teacher

pronounced—Lyon was that man. There was nothing suggesting the king of beasts about him. To speak of him as lamblike would be doing young mutton an injustice, for lambs are supposed to skip and gambol occasionally, and our Lyon lacked the spirit to do anything so energetic. He was little and meek and very, very well-meaning and well-behaved. The committee engaged him because of his learning. His knowledge of Greek and Latin so dazzled them that they forgot to ask concerning his ability as a disciplinarian.

My, but you and the shameless crew upstairs made poor Lyon's life miserable! It took the "big fellers" from the west end of the village—the fellows who only attended school in the winter and "worked out" summers—just two days to discover that the new teacher was an easy victim, quite incapable of managing even a modern kindergarten. And, after the big fellows made this discovery, the little ones helped to profit by it. Cæsar, what a bedlam that schoolroom became! "Spitballs" flew in showers, whispering was done openly, feet were shuffled, books

Our Village

were dropped, bent pins were fired from elastic catapults. Lyon, nervous little creature, would lose control of his temper and shriek and threaten, but, as his threats were never carried into effect, they were only so much more amusement for the committee on torture, which in this case was a committee of the whole.

“Stop that noise!” the poor fellow would shout, alluding to a low humming, like that of a swarm of bees, which was filling the apartment.

“Hum-m-m!”

“Stop it, I say!” *

“Hum-m-m-m-m!”

“I tell you STOP! I know the guilty parties. I have my eye on them!”

“HUM-M-M-M-M!”

To hum with one's mouth closed, and with eyes studiously fixed upon a book, is a knack easily acquired. As for knowing the guilty parties—well, everybody was a guilty party, and when Lyon stamped down one aisle it was as silent as the tomb. He rushed away to locate the sound in another aisle, and, behold,

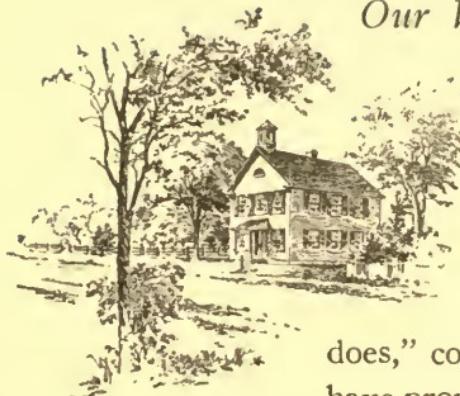
Teacher

it was not; while behind him it began again louder than ever.

The leaves of his books were stuck together with chewing gum or mucilage. Some one put a live mouse in his desk. One reprobate, who is ashamed of it now, filled the hollowed-out wooden seat of his armchair with water. Mr. Lyon happened that morning to be wearing a pair of very thin summer trousers—his only pair of winter ones being mended by kind-hearted Widow Cummings—and after he sat down in that icy water, to rise with enthusiastic promptness and energy, he shivered through the forenoon session. In the afternoon he attempted to chastise “Bitters” Ginn, and not only did not succeed in accomplishing the feat, but suffered the humiliation of having his ferule taken away from him and of being told by “Bitters” himself to “run along and set down, like a nice little boy.”

That evening he was heard weeping in his room by Mrs. Cummings’s servant girl. Next morning he came to the school accompanied by Squire Benijah Penniman, chairman of the school committee. Squire Penniman made us a

Our Village



little speech. Unlike his usual speeches, it was brief and very much to the point.

"We gen'rally figger, the committee does," concluded the squire, "to have proper order and obedjunce to discipline in the schoolrooms of this town. And by mighty, we *cal'late to have 'em here!* Next week the reg'lar April vacation ought to begin. Downstairs'll have that vacation. Upstairs won't. You'll stay here and study your lesson books, and them that don't study 'em 'll hear from me—from *me*. D'you understand?"

We understood. Cap'n Benijah had been skipper of an Australian clipper in his day and had handled mutinous crews before. There was sullen silence until he departed; then the turmoil broke loose worse than ever.

Cheat us out of our vacation, hey? Maybe we might have to come to school, but study and "obedjunce to discipline"—these were different. Various plots were laid and schemes

Teacher

hatched. "Bitters" and his friends were the ringleaders in all these. Mr. Lyon's life during the coming fortnight bade fair to be more strenuous than ever. He would not lack entertainment, at any rate.

But on Sunday morning he was not at church. The corner pew with the pillar in it, which he had taken because it was cheap and no one else liked it, was empty. You heard Mrs. Cummings tell Abitha Doane, after meeting, that "Teacher ain't feelin' a mite well, poor little man. He's in bed now, all het up and feverish, and if he ain't better when I get back home I'm goin' to have Dr. Penrose in. Them dreadful young ones at school have worried him sick, that's what's the trouble. It's a shame! good and well-meanin' as he is."

You should have been repentant and conscience-stricken on hearing this piece of news. You are now, as you think of it. But then, shameful to relate, your most dominant sentiment was hope. If teacher was sick, why—why, then there coulan't be any school on Monday. You might get the vacation after

Our Village

all. Hooray! You hastened to spread the tidings.

Sure enough, on Monday morning Mr. Lyon was not at his desk upstairs. Being as methodical in some things as he was unpractical in most others, it had been his custom to enter the school yard precisely at quarter to nine, as the janitor was ringing the "first bell." But now he came not. There were all sorts of rumors afloat—he was very sick, he was threatened with typhoid, he might die—"Bitters" Ginn said he hoped he would.

Five minutes to nine. The "last bell" was ringing. Some of the weaklings, actuated by force of habit and vague fears, went up to the schoolroom and took their seats; but the majority remained in the yard and joined in the song which "Bitters" was leading:

"An eagle flew from north to south
With Solomon Lyon in his mouth,
And when he found he had a fool
He dropped him at the upstairs school."

"Once more," yelled the choirmaster; "and holler it good and loud!"

Teacher

But we did not "holler." A buggy drove up to the hitching post and two people got out. One of these people was Squire Penniman and the other was Miss Olivia Simpson, the downstairs teacher.

"Go into that schoolhouse, the whole crew of you. Lively now!" roared the squire, in his quarter-deck voice. We obeyed orders and were lively.

"Now then," growled the committeeman, standing by the teacher's desk and glaring at the pupils, "this school'll come to order. Silence, aft there! D'you want me to come down to you?"

The question was addressed to the rebellious "Bitters," who had shuffled his feet. The shuffling stopped in the middle of a scrape.

"I s'pose," continued Cap'n Benijah, "that you thought because your outrageous actions had made your teacher sick—yes, he's sick, poor fellow, and likely to be wuss—I s'pose you thought they'd be no school for this coming fortni't, after all. There will be. Miss Simpson is going to take Mr. Lyon's place.

Our Village

She'll teach you and you're to mind her. And just remember this," he added, in an ominous growl; "me and the committee are backing her up. Miss Olivia, you can take the ship—the school, I should say."

To be handed over to a woman! To be put in charge of a downstairs teacher! The indignity of it! The school set its teeth and glared at the big, raw-boned female who stepped to the front of the platform. Let her wait—only just wait! What had been done to Lyon wouldn't be a circumstance to what was coming to her.

Ah, well, as grandma used to say, "you can't most always sometimes tell." What we did to Miss Olivia Simpson isn't worth mentioning. What she did to us is well worth the mention, but would fill a book. You may condense it by saying that, before the first week was over, that schoolroom was as calm and peaceful as the Schoolhouse Pond on a June morning.

And she had her own ways of achieving results. The manner in which she squelched the mighty "Sumach Bitters" Ginn was a tri-

Teacher

umph. "Bitters" came to school on the second morning armed with a perfect battery of mammoth spitballs, prepared the night before; he had both pockets of his jacket full of them.

The first of these projectiles whizzed across the room and spread-eagled on the blackboard over the "girls' side" with a sticky "spat." Everybody laughed; that is, everybody but "teacher."

"Obed Ginn," observed Miss Olivia, "you may go to the board and clean that off."

"Bitters's" reply to this command was the declaration that he "wan't cleanin' up spitballs much these days." He had done some preparatory boasting to the effect that he'd make the "old gal set up and take notice." *He* didn't give a durn about losing a few recesses.

But Miss Olivia made no mention of forfeited recesses. She did not even answer her rebellious pupil. She sat down at her desk, wrote a few lines, inclosed them in an envelope, and handed the envelope to one of the smaller boys in a front seat. The boy departed with the note. Miss Simpson called



Our Village

for the recitation by the first class in arithmetic. "Bitters" grinned triumphantly.

Perhaps to grin then was good judgment on his part. At any rate, he grinned no more that day. The messenger having returned, a knock sounded on the door leading from the coat room, and Miss Olivia announced that some one without desired to speak to him, Obed. "Bitters" adjourned to the coat room and the door closed after him.

Then from behind that closed door came sounds, various and animate, sounds suggestive of a thrashing machine in full operation, accompanied by yells and protests in the well-known voice of "Sumach Bitters." The school was intensely agitated, but teacher didn't seem even interested. She continued to question the first class in arithmetic.

After a time the sounds ceased. Then the door opened and Obed Ginn appeared. He was disheveled, his fat face was red and tear-

Teacher

stained, and the torn collar of his shirt was gripped by the sinewy fingers of Mr. Felix Ginn, his father. Felix was six feet four inches in height, and his shoulders brushed either side of the doorway. In his free hand was the frazzled remnant of an apple-wood switch—or rather of what had been the small limb of an apple-tree.

"Here he is, marm," observed Ginn, senior. "I cal'late he'll mind yer for a spell, anyway. If he don't, you send for me again. I'm workin' right over here on Cap'n Bangs's cranberry swamp, and that's handy by."

From that time on "Bitters" was an extremely mild dose.

At the end of the two weeks, during which the downstairs scholars played and the upstairs studied, it was generally supposed that Mr. Lyon, having recovered from his illness, would return to his teaching. He did, but it was to the teaching of the primary, the downstairs room. Miss Olivia Simpson continued to preside upstairs.

"Humph!" grunted Squire Penniman, as he made the announcement. "I told you the

Our Village

committee cal'lated to have order and obed-junce to proper discipline up here, didn't I? Well, we've got just them things, thanks to this lady. The downstairs scholars 'pear to have sense enough not to act like babies—that's why we give 'em the teacher that's usually given to young men and women. And you, acting like babies, and spiled babies at that, you get the baby teacher. And when you need spanking, I rather guess she can give it to you."

For two years after that Miss Olivia continued to teach upstairs and Mr. Lyon downstairs. And during these two years the Sewing Circle and the Good Templars' Society and the Ladies' Shakespeare Reading Club whispered and surmised and guessed and wondered. Then the mine was sprung. Both teachers resigned simultaneously. They had been engaged for months and were to be married immediately.

Squire Benijah Penniman, when he heard the astounding news, voiced the prevailing sentiment.

"Well, by mighty!" exclaimed the squire.

Teacher

"That beats all, don't it? And yet I don't know. Olivia's one of them women that's made so by mistake. She's too much of a man herself to want to tie up with a real male critter, and that's why she took a notion to Lyon. She can boss him and earn money for him, and he can take care of the plants and do the mending. Humph! Well, I'll bet she did the proposing."

Mr. Lyon is a minister of the Gospel now. And a successful one, too, so they say. There is a shrewd suspicion that, although he may write his own sermons, his wife edits them. And she is president of the Church Ladies' Aid, and a member of the parish committee. Likewise she usually leads the prayer meeting and acts as assistant superintendent of the Sunday-school. And that Sunday-school is the best behaved one in the State where it is located.

You have lost track of many of the old teachers. But "Specs" Bandmann's name appears in the papers occasionally. He is ably filling an appropriate position—superintendent of a large insane asylum. You are

Our Village

willing to bet that his preliminary training with "Bitters" and the other "big fellers" in our upstairs school has been of service to him in dealing with the violent patients.

A CHRISTMAS MEMORY



A CHRISTMAS MEMORY

IT was coming. Already the breath of it was in the air. When you went down to Daniels's after a pound of currants and a quarter pound of citron—you and Gyp—you could feel it in the wind, blowing across the snow-covered fields and over the frozen salt meadows. The breakers, 'way off yonder along the outer bar, where the white ice cakes ended and the deep-blue water began, sang it to you. The rows of little icicles strung along the apple-tree limbs like the fringe on grandma's cashmere shawl—the one pa brought home from sea and which she kept in the spare room bureau drawer, packed in camphor, because it was too nice to wear—clicked against

Our Village

each other as the boughs swung back and forth, and sounded like the sleigh bells you used to dream about before you grew up and knew what was what concerning Santa Claus. It was coming! You had to stop in the snow and grin for sheer joy.

Down at Daniels's it was very much in evidence. The real store was over at Orham, five miles off, but Cap'n Daniels wasn't so old or nearsighted as not to see his duty and do it, after a fashion. The candy jars on the counter were filled with brand-new striped sticks. The cover was off the big box of prunes just in from Boston. Where the case of O. N. T. cotton used to stand, by the end of the pipe and tobacco show case, a space had been cleared, and there was a collection of jackknives and thimbles and "housewife's companions," and monkeys on sticks that jumped up and down when you worked them, and tin horses and carts, and some baby dolls for ten cents, and—and—lots more.

And farther on there were some tidies that Aunt Tryphosa Daniels had knit, and some splint-work photograph frames that Susan T.

A Christmas Memory

had made—splint work was so pretty and so easy to do—and more really expensive things, including two plush books with “Album” in tin letters on the covers. The albums weren’t new, however; Cap’n Daniels had bought them three years before and hadn’t yet been able to sell them. No wonder! they cost a dollar and a quarter a piece. Who wanted to spend that much money here at home, when you could go to Orham and have such a big assortment to choose from?

“ You tell your folks,” says Cap’n Daniels, adjusting a pair of specs—he used two pairs, one “nigh-to” and the other “fur-off”—“you tell your folks to home that when they want to buy their Christmas presents this year they ain’t got to hitch up no team. Tell ’em to come and see me. You tell ’em that, now, will you? Keep your hands out of them prunes.”

Grandma was in the kitchen when you got back. The breath of the coming was there, too, and its odor was spicy and warm and sweet. The cook stove was red hot, pretty near. When you wanted a quick, hot fire you

Our Village

put in pine. When you wanted a fire to keep, and to bake with, you started with the pine and then loaded in the heavy oak chunks. You knew all about it. Why shouldn't you? Didn't you have to fill the oilcloth-covered wood box every morning? And who, if not you, piled the double rows on each side of the potato cellar?—pitchy stick pine on one side, and oak, with the moss on the bark, on the other.

Grandma was making fruit cake. When it was done, she would frost it with some stuff like sugared cement or wall plaster, and put the loaves in the tin box in the parlor closet.

“Gramma.”

“Well, Jimmie, what is it? Don't bother me more'n you have to. I'm awful busy.”

“Can I have just one currant?”

“No, you can't. Well, *just* one then. Land sakes! Is that what you call one? Clear out of this kitchen, quick.”

“Aw, there ain't nowheres to go.” It was Saturday, and therefore “no school.”

“Why don't you go skating? I saw the other boys going; Eddie Rogers and all.”

A Christmas Memory

“Aw, my skates ain’t any good.”

“No *good*? Why, Jimmie Snow, how you talk! You ain’t had those skates but two year, and——”

“Yes, but they don’t wear that kind of skates any more. Old heel plates! Always have to be digging ’em out. Oak-legs—I mean Sammie Foster—has got a pair of Ice Royals. Ain’t they bully, though! Just have to put ’em against your shoe and push a thing in—a little mite of an iron thing—and they’re on. No heel plates, nor screws, nor straps, nor nothing. Say, gramma!”

“Um-hum.”

“Say, gramma! *Gramma!*”

“Well, well! What is it?”

“Won’t you and grandpa get me a pair of Ice Royals for Christmas? Aw, please.”

“No, no. ’Course not. How many times are you going to ask that?”

“Aw, say, gramma! Sammie Foster’s got ’em, and Snuppy Rogers’s folks are going to give him some, and——”

“I can’t help it. Tim Foster’s made money out of his cranberries this year, and your

Our Village

gran'pa's bogs didn't bear hardly anything. That kind of skates cost two dollars and a quarter, and that's a lot of money these hard times."

"Please, gramma. I won't ask for a thing else if you'll only get *them*. Not one least little mite of a thing. Aw, *pleasec.*"

"No, no. Run along out of here."

"But Oaks and Snuppy'll have 'em. Please do, gramma. I won't ask——"

"Well, well! we'll see. Do clear out and let me alone. I don't know whether I've put pepper or cinnamon into this cake; I snum if I do!"

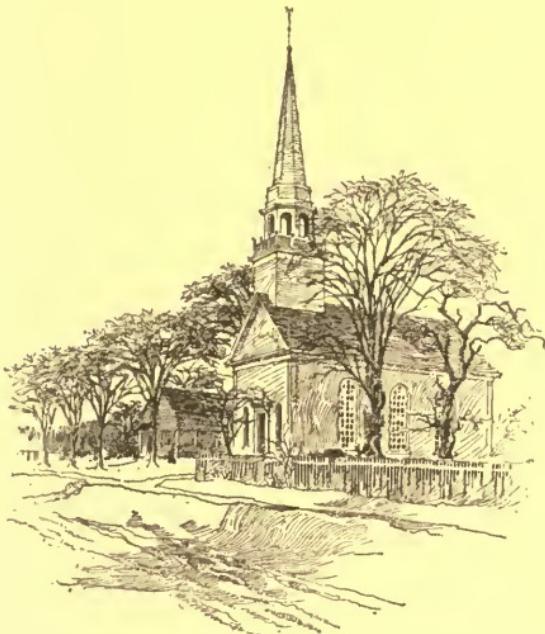
You "hooked" another fistful of currants and departed, feeling, on the whole, hopeful. "We'll see," was encouraging. And besides, how did she know what the skates cost, if——

Grandma called after you as you were leaving. She wanted to know if you wouldn't find the twins and see what they were up to. She "cal'lated" they were over at the Rogers's. And would you be sure and ask Clorinda Rogers not to forget to send her the receipt

A Christmas Memory

for the pudding sass. Any time before Tuesday night would do.

The twins were at the Rogers's. They were watching Mrs. Rogers—Snuppy's ma—make



evergreen wreaths for the church. There was to be a Sunday-school Christmas concert on the very next evening. That showed you how close at hand was the coming. Only one—two—three—four more days—and then!

Our Village

You were to speak a piece at that concert, you remember. "In the solemn midnight," was it? Or "Somebody's Mother"?

"The woman was old and ragged and gray,
And bent with the chill of the winter's day."

Perhaps that was it. And one of the twins was to speak, "Hang up the baby's stocking."

The children were not to take part in the regular morning service that Christmas. The year before, when the new minister was *very* new, they had done so. The girls, all in their "Sunday-go-to-meeting" gowns, and happy, were in the gallery on one side of the organ, and the boys, in hated starchy collars and a generally wretched and rebellious state, were on the other side. And when it was very still, after the prayer, the girls piped up shrill and clear:

"Watchman, tell us of the night,
What its signs of glory are."

And the boys answered back with:

"Traveler, o'er yon mountain height,
See that glory beaming star."

And so on.

A Christmas Memory

All the fathers and mothers and the Sunday-school teachers, who were in the secret, thought it "so cute" and "perfectly lovely." But old Deacon Mayo, who hadn't known it was coming and was asleep, jumped half out of his pew and made even the minister laugh. The deacon all but called a parish meeting in consequence. "'Twas a healthy state of things if divine service was to be made a show of by a lot of play-acting young ones."

That evergreen smelled more Christmassy than anything else—more, even, than grandma's kitchen. You and Snuppy had gathered it, up in the pines by Scudder's pond. You knew the place, of course, and you scraped away the snow and there it was, fresh and bright as could be. And you brought home "hog-cranberry" vines with berries on them, and maybe a little holly from a bush you knew of. But holly was scarce.

Snuppy's ma—your own ma had died when the twins were born; just before your pa was lost at sea—said that Eddie, which was Snuppy's dressed-up name, had gone skating. So,



Our Village

after a while, you took the twins on your sled and went up to find him.

And there, where the melting snow had made a long string of puddles among the stubs of last year's cornstalks, were Snuppy and Oaks Foster and "Peeler" Davis, and more of the "gang." And the talk was all of the coming.

"I was over to Orham with pa yesterday," says Oaks. "And Mullett's store's full of the rippingest things. Just heaps and heaps of 'em. And there's the bulliest magic lantern, with pictures to show. You hang up a sheet, and— Aw, it's great! And I teased pa, and I bet I'll get it for Christmas."

"Get out! Bet you don't. Why, magic lanterns cost barrels of money! *You* won't get that, Oaks; don't be trying to show off."

But down in your envious heart you bet that he would get it. Why couldn't grandpa's cranberry bogs bear as well as other people's? It shook your confidence in religion,

A Christmas Memory

somehow. Grandpa was a "professor" in prayer meeting, and Oaks's pa swapped horses and didn't go to church, and even played with cards—or so it was reported. The kind of cards gamblers use, too; not those with letters on them, like your Logomachy set.

So you talked and speculated and wished all the way home. And so you did the next day, during the sermon. And when grandma asked you for the text, you had forgotten it, and she begged to know what end you thought you were coming to.

When Sunday, concert and all, was over, and you went to school on Monday morning, it was just the same. The general atmosphere of hot stove, wet rubbers, and damp slates was much as usual, but in through the windows poured the December sun, cutting long, gold-powdered lanes through the dusty air. Just like the glory from heaven that streamed down upon the shepherds, as it was pictured in your "Story of the Bible." And girls and boys fidgeted, and whispered, and absentmindedly missed in their lessons. And

Our Village

teacher didn't scold, for she, too, was absent-minded. There was that young man who came over from Harniss on Sundays; the one with the lavender trousers and black "Clay diagonal," who drove the fast horse. What would he bring her for this, the last Christmas before——

Even the "Injun camp" up in the scrub back of Peeler Davis's barn was corrupted by the disturbing influence. You had a fire there, and boiled potatoes in a tin kettle—really boiled 'em, just as Dick Lewis or Old Bob Kelley, the trappers, might have done. Bars and buffler! think of it. But now, instead of burning anyone at the stake, or following rabbit tracks and pretending them to be those of grizzly bears, you stood around the fire and mused and guessed and hoped.

There was precious little fun in scalping a fellow, when he interrupted the operation to observe:

"Oh, say, Tinker! Did you hear what Ben Sears is going to have? An air gun. Yes, sir! One that shoots shot. We must let him join the tribe; then maybe we can take it

A Christmas Memory

sometimes. Aw, cracky!
Don't you wish you was
him?"

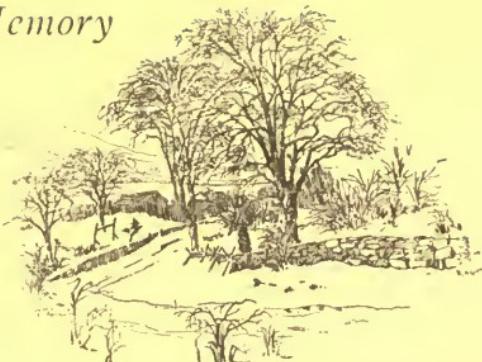
You and the other noble redmen strolled home through the dusk, bragging about the wonders that were to be yours, and loudly pitying little innocents, like the twins, who didn't know any better than to believe in Santa Claus.

But the twins didn't need any pity. They gloried in their ignorance and shouted demands and supplications up the fireplace, sure that Santa, listening at the chimney top, would hear and take notes. They sat, wide-eyed, as grandma read them how:

"He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down on a thistle."

They heard the sleigh bells and the prancing hoofs already. Your lofty air of condescending superiority was entirely wasted on the twins.

Grandpa came home from Orham on Tues-



Our Village

day, just before dark. The sleigh was filled with brown-paper parcels. Most of these were intrusted to you to carry to the house.

"And don't you touch a thing, sonny; understand? And go in the front door so's the twins won't hear you. Put the bundles on the bed in our room and send grandma up there right off."

"But, grandpa, this ain't all. What's those others? And what's that big one you've got under your coat?"

"Never you mind. Trot right along. And see here! don't you tell gramma you see me with anything else. If you do I'll—I don't know's I won't skin you."

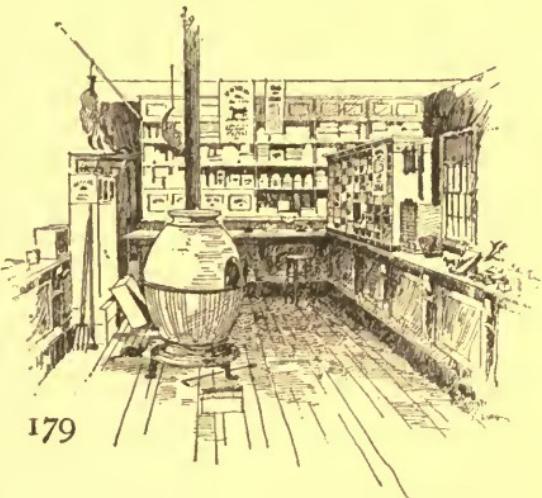
So you went tiptoeing in at the front door, the door so seldom used that to open it seemed strange even to you. And when you had disappeared, grandpa hurried to the tool box in the back kitchen, where he deposited the big package, the heavy shawl that grandma had long coveted but didn't "feel right to afford," and the little box containing the jet earrings shaped like daisy blossoms. And meanwhile grandma, upstairs in the bedroom,

A Christmas Memory

was hastily locking up the almost finished "double-knit driving mittens" that were to keep grandpa's toil-roughened hands warm later on.

The old house was filled with secrets. Closet doors were locked and bureau-drawer keys had flown. It was all mysterious and creepy and—splendid.

Down at the post office—which was Daniels's store under its other name—the crowd waiting that evening for the mail to be sorted was larger than usual; and it had to wait longer, too. When the depot wagon drove up to the door and the carrier entered with the bulging leather sack, Cap'n Daniels resigned the tidy and album trade to Aunt Tryphosa and disappeared into the little room behind the frames of letter boxes. Occasionally you caught glimpses of him holding a small package to the light, and peer-



Our Village

ing doubtfully at the address through his "nigh-to" glasses.

"Now hold on, all hands!" commands the cap'n, pushing up the slide of the distributing window. "Don't everybody shove and holler. There's a whole mess of these 'ere bundles."

He proceeds to read the names on the wrappers, stammering and hesitating and stopping occasionally to wipe his spectacles. One by one the packages are claimed. Oaks Foster gets one and leaves in triumph. The school-teacher's name is called and her young brother steps forward to receive a neat oblong box tied with red ribbon. You get three; one for yourself and one for each of the twins. The postmark was Eastboro—Aunt Susan's folks, of course.

And at last, it was here, the night when "all through the house"—and the rest of it. The twins, wild with excitement, were packed off to bed. To sleep? Well, not for the first hour, at any rate.

Half past eight. You took the candlesticks from the kitchen mantel.

A Christmas Memory

"Good night, gramma. Good night, grandpa."

"Good night, Jimmie. Shut your door tight, and go right to sleep."

It was cold, mighty cold, up in the little bedroom with the window under the eaves and the painted bunches of flowers on the bedstead and bureau and washstand. The feathers felt soft and snug beneath you, and blankets and the "log-cabin" quilt warm above. The wind talked and whimpered around the window. Outside it was all white and shiny and still. You must go to sleep quick because that would bring the morning. But you simply *couldn't* sleep. Why was it necessary for the night before Christmas to last a million years? How about those sheep jumping the wall? One—two—three . . . twenty-six—twenty-seven . . . forty-one—forty-two . . . for—"

You know now—you didn't know it then—that down in the dining room the brown-paper packages were piled on the floor and grandpa was cutting the strings. The stockings—not the twins' own stockings: oh, no! they were too small; but a pair of grandma's

Our Village

—were hanging by the mantel. Little by little they grew warty and dropsical and shapeless.

Grandpa undoes another package. Grandma, standing with the candle in her hand—she is just about to light it—looks on.

"He'll be awful tickled with them skates," says grandpa musingly. "Land sakes! he'd ought to be; they cost enough."

"Yes, I know," replies grandma. "But I'm so glad you got 'em for him. Seems to me that—that 'twould have pleased James so. He set such store by that boy."

"Maybe he knows about it, Mary. Maybe he does."

"Maybe so."

A silence, and then the candle was lighted

and the door closed.

The old house shut its eyes. The wind sang and whistled.

The icy sleigh bells on the apple-tree boughs clinked and chimed.

The stars shone bright





"He'll be awful tickled with them skates."

A Christmas Memory

and clear, just as they must have shone over Bethlehem.

* * * * *

“Gramma! Gramma!”

“Well, what is it? I can’t hardly hear myself think, them children make such a racket.”

“Gramma, sit down a minute and let me show you. See; it’s just like I said: all you have to do is put it against your foot and push in this little lever thing. There!”

“Do you like ‘em?”

“You just *bet!*” There is a little shake in your voice, a quiver of pure, unadulterated happiness, such as comes not too often in a lifetime. Grandma hears it, and her spectacles grow misty. Her boy’s boy! She takes off the spectacles and wipes them.

Your own eyeglasses grow misty, now, as you think of it.

Ah, hum. . . . Well. . . . Merry Christmas!

(1)

THE END

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